

# ADHD

# Small steps

# Big impact

Manual for parents



Erasmus+



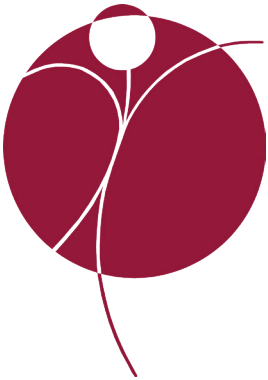
**HELPING HAND**

Helping Hyper Activity Nurture Development

**RAABE**



# Helping Hand project partners



# Contents

## Introduction

### Unit 1 How Children Develop

- 5 1a Emotional, Behavioural and Cognitive Development in Early Childhood
- 9 1b Understanding Typical and Challenging Behaviours in Early Childhood

### Unit 2 ADHD

- 12 2a What is ADHD?
- 15 2b ADHD and Executive Functions
- 17 2c ADHD and the Environment
- 19 2d Strength-Based Approaches to Understanding ADHD

### Unit 3 Supporting Children with ADHD-Like Behaviours at Home

- 21 3a Strengths-based approaches
- 25 3b Environmental modification: Creating a Structured Nurturing Environment
- 31 3c Executive function
- 34 3d Working with Emotions and Developing Emotional Regulation
- 41 3e Behaviour modification

### Unit 4 Working with your child, your child's school, and other professionals

- 46 4a If your child has received a diagnosis of ADHD
- 48 4b Working with Children
- 50 4c Working with your child's kindergarten
- 52 4d Working with other professionals and the community
- 54 4e Cooperation with the other parents

## HELPING HAND – ADHD. SMALL STEPS. BIG IMPACT. MANUAL FOR PARENTS

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# Introduction

When a child's behaviour differs from parental expectations, parents may feel helpless and exhausted in their parenting role. The child may be disorganized, disobedient, talk constantly, or prone to temper tantrums, and parents may only hear complaints about their child from kindergarten teachers.

One possible cause of such difficulties may be Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or ADHD-like behaviours.

Difficulties associated with ADHD may cause challenges not only for parents, but for the whole family, the school and peers. But the biggest challenges are those faced by the affected child. ADHD may have effects from early childhood, often up to adulthood. Studies of individuals with ADHD have shown higher frequencies of stopping studies earlier than other children, achieving lower levels of qualification, workplace problems as adults, higher likelihood of marriage ending in divorce, and being less popular amongst peers (Young, Toone and Tyson, 2003).

However, research has also shown that if children with ADHD receive timely support in the form of early intervention and supportive, understanding environments, they are more likely to develop their existing talents and strengths (Chacko et al., 2014). With their creativity and unique world view, individuals with ADHD have the potential to make important contributions to their communities and society.

In order to achieve the benefits of early intervention, it is therefore important that parents make contact with a specialist and start providing support at home as soon as they suspect that their child may have ADHD-like behaviours.

This manual provides guidelines for the provision of this type of support for preschool children. The methods described do not work as a magic wand, and not all the methods will work in the same way for every child, so parents will need to identify what works best for their individual child. Effective outcomes require time, patience, and preferably the whole family's co-operation. It is also vital to involve the teacher in the process, and this manual provides guidance for this, too. Children without a formal diagnosis of ADHD can nonetheless show similar behaviour; in this manual, this is described as ADHD-like or challenging behaviour.

This manual also has a teacher version, and when used in combination home and school are supporting the development of the child. These manuals were developed using developmental specialists, and created in collaboration with kindergarten teachers and parents, and so combines different areas of knowledge and expertise with up-to-date research into how to support children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviours.

The first two units present theoretical background about childhood development and ADHD, and the remaining units contain suggested guidelines, techniques and methods that may be used in practice. By discussing challenges that are familiar to many parents, it is hoped that this manual will support the daily functioning of the children and parents concerned, and that the techniques and strategies can be applied in everyday life. Be aware, however, that some of the suggestions contained in this manual may require parents to ask themselves questions about their own responses, and changes in the child's behaviour may depend on the need for changes in parental behaviour.

If ADHD is recognized in a timely manner and development is appropriately supported, it can be managed effectively with positive outcomes. By doing so, we can spare the child and the whole family much suffering, enable the child to achieve his/her wealth of potential and improve the quality of life of children with ADHD in the long run. It is hoped that this manual may help parents try something new in their support of young children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviours.

**Remember, every child is different. Select the methods that work best for our child and introduce them gradually. True change requires trial, time and persistence.**



# Unit 1 How Children Develop

## 1a Emotional, Behavioural and Cognitive Development in Early Childhood

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand how most children develop the ability to manage their emotions and behaviours
- » Understand the role of the environment in the development of this ability

Every child is born with a lot of learning potential – we are born primed to explore our environment and ourselves. As parents, it is up to us to tap into the natural tendencies of our child, and to create the best developmental environment for them.

The term “typical development” refers to a complex concept which varies between children. This is especially true in the early years, in terms of timing and rate of development. For example, most children start speaking somewhere between 18 to 24 months, but some start speaking earlier, while others (without developmental concerns) may not speak until after the age of 2.

Developmental trajectories vary between children, which is why such broad age ranges are considered to be “normal” for the development of specific skills in young children. Skills may develop relatively later for some children; this may be due to a variety of reasons, many of which are not problematic at all.

However, when a child achieves developmental milestones slightly later than their friends, it may indicate a need to pay greater attention to their development, or to give the child extra developmental support.

When thinking about “normal” development, parents may have a picture of a “good child” in their heads. “Normal development” may be envisaged as a baby, and later a toddler, demonstrating average development according to

that which is written about in books. This perception of “normal” may include the idea that the child does not do things too early and is not being delayed in any of the developmental domains.

In today’s society, we often focus on that which is considered to be the “well-behaved” child; these children are imaged to be those who eat well, cry only a little, play nicely with other children, speak nicely to adults, sit still when they are told to, and listen to what they are told at all times. But these children do not really exist, or at the very least are in the minority.

Within normative childhood development, there are huge individual differences at play, and healthy development includes some behaviours that parents may find difficult. For example, at around the age of 2 years, children may start demonstrating oppositional behaviours. While these behaviours may be challenging to managed, this is an important step within the normal development of autonomy. As parents, it is important to understand these behaviours as part of the child’s journey to flourishing into autonomous young people and then adults.

It is also important to recognise that a child’s development does not occur without the influence of their surroundings. Indeed, the child’s environments (such as the physical and social world) greatly impact on their development. When children behave in ways that are perceived as undesirable, parents often try to alter their behaviour. They may do this through modelling an example for the child (for example, if a child does not greet an acquaintance, the parent might say a loud “hello” to draw the child’s attention to the expectation of greeting others).

However, every child has a range of attributes and characteristics, which includes positives as well as perceived challenges. Parents should strive to see the possibilities and strengths of each child, while considering what their behaviour may be trying to communicate. Remember that young children experience the same range of emotions that adults do, but may not have yet developed the language or means of communicating their feelings. For example, a child may be sad, hurt or hungry and may act out using angry or aggressive behaviours as their only means of expression. We must always seek to understand why a child presents challenging behaviour, so that potential underlying causes may be addressed (e.g. developmental delay, environmental factors, or a combination of the two).

FIGURE 1. DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES VARY BETWEEN CHILDREN



From early childhood, there is a long way to go, until the infant develops into an adult who:

- » takes responsibility for themselves;
- » understands, plays, and works well with others;
- » has developed a range of effective coping strategies;
- » independently solves problems;
- » regulates their own behaviour and responds effectively to situations;
- » has a positive and realistic sense of who they are;
- » understands and regulates their own emotions;
- » understands and empathizes with others.

Childhood development occurs across a multitude of realms and incorporates a broad range of developmental components. In order for the developing child to acquire the various skills listed above, these components need to develop efficiently and work together effectively. The maturation of the nervous system, physical development, cognitive development, spiritual experiences, and social changes are inseparable. **Development is holistic** – this means that all of these **factors are interconnected and influence one another**.

In order to understand the behaviour of a young child, these biological, psychological, social and cultural factors should be considered together. For example, social development is not only influenced by physiology (neuro-biology and motor development), it is also heavily influenced by opportunities to interact with other people. In this way, children learn specific languages and also specific norms, rituals, and behaviours from the people and groups that they are a part of.

Decades of research into child development has shown **that other people in the child's environment matter**. This includes parent(s)/carer(s) and other caring nurturing adults. During early childhood, the parent(s)/carer(s) play an essential role in creating that caring or nurturing environment.

**In an effectively nurturing environment, the child:**

- » is understood, accepted, and valued;
- » has opportunities to express and learn to regulate their emotions, impulses, and behaviours;
- » has access to caring adults who help them deal effectively with problems, difficulties, and resulting stress;
- » is provided with clear structure and boundaries, which provide a sense of safety and understandable rules;
- » is provided with opportunities for social development through interaction with adults and other children (e.g. relating to others, being part of a group, cooperation, empathy) (Schaffer & Kipp, 2014).

## Self-regulation

Self-regulation refers to a complex process that allows the child (and later the adult) to respond flexibly and appropriately to on-going and changing environmental demands. Development of self-regulation is an essential feature in typical childhood development and it is also implicated in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Self-regulation allows the individual to control and modify thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when needed, so that goals can be achieved or behaviours adapted to suit different situations. For example, when another child takes a child's toy, try to observe how they respond. It's likely that all children will feel a sense of frustration but not all children will respond the same. Some children (with more developed self-regulation skills) may choose to tell an adult or distract themselves with another toy. However, other children might try to grab the toy back or possibly lash out physically. These types of challenges are encountered throughout the lifespan – for example, in adulthood, another driver might cut you off or a colleague might say something that causes frustration. Our reactions to these situations depend on our self-regulation abilities.

In order to map a given situation and decide on the most appropriate behavioural response, an individual needs to be able to access their **attention** and **executive functioning skills**; self-regulation plays a central role in being able to access these important brain areas (Berger, 2011). Later chapters in this manual will further explore how difficulties in self-regulation and executive function are thought to underpin many ADHD-like or challenging behaviours.

One aspect of self-regulation is emotional control: the ability to feel and express emotions at an appropriate level and to manage them according to the demands of different situations and environments (Lakatos, 2011). For example, everyone cries. However, how we cry changes over the course of our lives, due to the development of emotional control. Think about a two-year-old child who falls down on the playground - they get a shock and might scrape their knee. It is not unusual for them to burst into tears – the crying and inconsolable wailing may go on for some time. We do not always look at this as “atypical”, however, if a 16-year-old responded in the same way, we might not view this as a typical behavioural response. The reason we do not usually see such an extreme response from a 16-year-old is because, while they might feel the same shock and pain, they have developed a range of other skills (e.g. self-awareness, social awareness, and self-soothing) that enable them to manage their emotions and their emotional responses differently.

**Teaching self-regulation for toddlers** is important because it allows the development of the following skills and abilities:

- » self-control;
- » perseverance;
- » decision making;
- » conflict management;
- » sustained effort;
- » goal setting;
- » productivity (i.e. effectively completing tasks);
- » problem solving;
- » advocacy and assertiveness;
- » following rules;
- » tolerance;
- » internalisation and reinforcement of compassion (important for empathy)

One of the **most important periods in the development of self-regulation is early childhood**. Part of this ability is innate (i.e. present from birth and associated with neurological development), however, the child's environment has a great impact on development of self-regulation, and research has confirmed that many of these skills can be taught.

The infant and toddler learn to adjust and adapt their behaviour to the world with the support of nurturing and caring adult. As the child develops, and gets a little older, the parental role changes and the child's dependency on the parent does and should decrease, but in early childhood there is a significant need for parents to take an active role in supporting the development of the child's development of self-regulation and emotional control.

To a large extent, supporting the development of the child's self-regulation and emotional control depends on effective observation and problem-solving skills of the adult. This requires **careful observation of the child in order to understand the specific area for development**, and provide relevant feedback and support in a nurturing way. When effective, the child then uses this feedback to become more skilled at independently regulating their own emotions and behavioural responses. This is usually an on-going process, rather than a one-off event, as these skills take time as well as trial and error to develop. These learning and experiential processes take place in the context of everyday life, and places responsibility on parent(s)/carer(s), teachers, and other caring adults to pay attention, be sensitive, and respond effectively.

The responsive parent, carer, or kindergarten teacher:

- » recognizes and accurately interprets the child's behavioural signals;
- » responds in a timely and appropriate manner;
- » adapts their response to the child's developmental stage and circumstances

In this manner, children gradually learn to recognise and interpret their own feelings, and become more independent in their management and regulation.

The “good co-regulating” parent / carer / teacher:

- » supports the development of the child's autonomy;
- » keeps his/her own behaviour consistent;
- » is structured;
- » is predictable;
- » is an active participant in the child's life (Grolnick, 2009)

**We are born with the capacity for self-regulation, but its development varies depending on personal individual attributes and opportunities for its development within our environment.**

To fully understand self-regulation (in order to effectively support children with ADHD-like or challenging behaviour) let's see **how it develops**.

### In the first year of life:

Initially, new-born infants are able to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant types of stimuli. The pursuit for self-regulation is present within their behaviour: *unpleasant stimuli* result in moving away (e.g. turning the head, closing eyes, crying) and *pleasant stimuli* trigger efforts to get closer to the stimuli. Some efficient forms of self-regulation include:

- » sucking a pacifier to self-sooth;
- » redirecting their attention (e.g. paying attention to an interesting toy for a second);
- » asking for external help (e.g. crying)

During the first six months of life, infants learn to regulate their sleep-wake cycles and undergo significant development of sensory motor control (i.e. they learn how to use their bodies independently to reach for objects, grab them voluntarily, move them from one hand to another, and so on) (Whitebread et al, 2012).

During these first months, the child's behavioural signals clearly serve social purposes, and they begin to develop their “social reference”: they learn who to turn to and will seek certain members of their environment when they need support. For example, when hearing a novel or unpleasant sound or encountering an unexpected toy, a baby may look to a trusted adult to signal how they should react. If they perceive fear on the adults' face, they may interpret the experience negatively, whereas if they see encouragement, they may approach the experience with interest.

By the end of the first year of life, a range of emotions (e.g. anger, joy, interest, sadness, fear) are identifiable in a child's behaviour. Along with the development of these abilities, self-regulation takes place with the active, caring participation of significant adults in the child's life.



### In the second year of life:

At this age, children begin to recognize that other people's thoughts and feelings are not the same as theirs. They begin to demonstrate more goal-directed behaviour and are better able to remember their goals and to actively pursue them. As a result, they may have a greater ability to sustain their attention and be less distractible. With adequate support, they are able to some extent to delay gratification and work towards their goals or getting what they want. This does not mean that they do not struggle to self-regulate. It is still hard for them to regulate their immediate emotional responses, but they are, for example, able to wait a little longer for food when hungry or to express annoyance or frustration in a less intense way.

Speech develops very rapidly during this period: children begin to understand simple verbal instructions and they develop greater control over their environment by using single or double-word combinations. For example, the child might signal that they want to play with something by saying "toy," with the result that this is given to them. Children use words to describe emotional content from the age of two; but emotional recognition and identification of emotions still have a long way to go. (Cole & Cole, 2006)

### In the third to sixth years of life:

During these years, toddlers explore the world primarily from their own point of view, however – contrary to past opinion – research has shown that children of these ages can understand the viewpoints of others, and can empathize with others well before the age of 3. There is also a great leap forward in the development of the ability to "mind read"; that is, in a given situation, they begin to understand that other people are separate from them, to imagine themselves in the situation of the other, and to empathize with another person's point of view or feelings. (Györi, 2004)

Children increasingly begin to show the ability to control their behaviour and (importantly) begin to adapt it to the demands of a particular situation. They apply rules for themselves and others; these behavioural rules (e.g. take your shoes off in the house) are understood, respected, and adhered to by the child and they make other people adhere to them too. For example, a toddler may explain to a younger sibling that if they do not eat their dinner, they will not be able to have sweets. During this time, children begin to understand situations and start to figure out strategies to solve situation-specific problems. These strategies are often based on strict adherence to specific rules.



**FIGURE 2.**  
**THE TRAFFIC LIGHT MODEL**  
**FOR ANGER MANAGEMENT**

As time goes by, and as the brain develops, children

can wait longer and longer for their demands, desires, and needs to be met. With their developing attentional capacity, they can focus more on a given task. As their emotional and cognitive skills develop, they can tolerate being separated from their loved ones better and for a longer time.

In addition to the environmental context (such as the physical environment, past experiences, family, community, etc.), **hereditary attributes and temperament** also play a role in childhood development (Ferenczi, 2011).

Within individual variability, children are born with certain attributes or tendencies to behaviour and will respond to the environment in particular ways as a result. As is to be expected across all aspects of development, self-regulation will show the usual amount of individual variation between children. **Some children are better able to meet the demands of their environment** (for example, adhere to an adult's request to not touch a chocolate bar on the table) while others struggle to do so.

Self-regulation is largely developed by young adulthood, but it can continue to develop and be developed later in life. Inadequately developed self-regulation or difficulties in this area can contribute to ADHD-like or challenging behaviour. (Lakatos, 2011) Therefore, it is important that during these years, children develop the ability to:

- » identify the emotions that they are feeling;
- » know the names / words for those feelings;
- » express their emotions in an appropriate way;
- » modify or regulate their emotions, for example, to be able to use a range of appropriate coping strategies to self-soothe or distract themselves;
- » adapt their emotions and thoughts in order to achieve a goal or complete a task.

## Test your Knowledge:

- » To understand development holistically, what factors do we need to consider?
- » What are some key characteristics of a nurturing environment?
- » What are the key characteristics of self-regulation?
- » Why is it important to support self-regulation in young children?
- » What developmental goals can be set to develop self-regulation for children aged 3-6?

## 1b Understanding Typical and Challenging Behaviours in Early Childhood

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand when, how, and why a child's behaviour might be concerning
- » Understand how our own cultural views may impact on how we view a child's behaviour

As previously explained, each child develops at their own pace, and there is great variability in terms of behavioural development. This is why developmental milestones charts (you can find one online or in your local library) show broad ranges of when a particular type of behaviour might be expected. It is outside the scope of this manual to explore typical behaviour development in depth, but it is important to bear in mind that “challenging behaviour” is considered in relation to what is most commonly expected within these broad ranges.

### What is Meant by “Challenging Behaviour”?

This program adopts the term “challenging behaviour” as opposed to “behaviour problems” which carries a negative connotation of blame toward the child. The term “challenging behaviour” shifts the focus from the child, to their broader context: a child's behaviour may be challenging **for a range of people** – parents, siblings, other children in the child's peer group and teachers. But the child themselves also shares the challenge, as they have not yet developed necessary coping skills to meet the demands of their environment.

All children will demonstrate challenging behaviour at some point, especially in early childhood – **it is a part of typical development**. These behaviours may be due, in part, to the rapid development of early childhood, when children have to develop many skills to regulate their own emotions, thoughts, and actions and achieve autonomy. As a result, parents of young children frequently encounter a number of behaviours that they perceive as challenging.

Examples of behaviours that may be perceived as challenging include:

- » seemingly inappropriate expressions of anger;
- » emotional outbursts;
- » physical and verbal aggression towards self or others;
- » disruptive behaviour;
- » oppositional behaviour or disobedience;
- » excessive activity;
- » destructive behaviour;
- » anxiety or withdrawn behaviour;
- » difficulties in separation;
- » controlling or dominating behaviour

### What Causes Challenging Behaviour?

When faced with challenging behaviours, what parents see is the overt external actions or behaviours of the child. However, it is essential to consider what underlies or causes the challenging behaviour. In order to do this, the parent **needs to understand the child's current state**.

The behaviour of all humans is, in part, a response to how the individual thinks or feels at a specific time (e.g. think about how you talk to someone when you are feeling stressed). In the same way, a child's behaviour is often influenced by how they are feeling, for example, they may act out if they feel:

- » sick;
- » tired;
- » hungry;
- » emotionally overwhelmed;
- » overloaded by sensory experiences;
- » unsafe.

## Understanding the Impacts of the Child's Environments

Parents need to be aware that demands or challenges of the environment might impact behaviour. Behaviour happens in a specific context but is influenced by a range of factors.

So, when considering any behaviour, it is worth considering if **there is something in the context or environment that may be contributing to the behaviour**. This is true in relation to positive behaviours (i.e. environmental factors that support desired behaviours of the child) as well as challenging behaviours (i.e. environmental factors that contribute to undesired behaviours).

It is also important to remember **the impact of sensory environments** – not all children respond in the same way to similar sensory experiences (e.g. touch, smell, movement) and some children can experience seemingly harmless sensations as being very unpleasant (e.g. bothered by labels on clothing, extreme fear of being on unstable surfaces).

Challenging behaviour can also occur as a response to potentially intense emotional experiences or major life changes, such as:

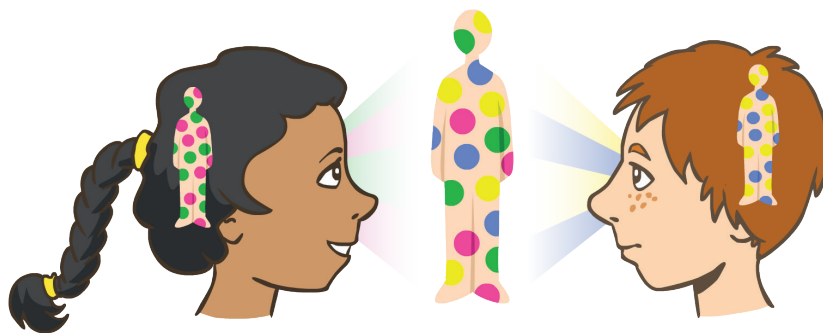
- » moving home;
- » birth of a sibling;
- » start of kindergarten, changing classes / years, returning after holidays / breaks;
- » communication difficulties with inability to communicate needs in a verbally accepted manner;
- » new teacher.

It is worth noting that **apparently minor change or transition may be perceived intensely by the child** and may lead to challenging behaviours.

Some children (especially those with executive functioning difficulties which will be explored later in this manual) may struggle to adapt to these (e.g. changing task or the end of break time).

In summary, when challenging behaviour occurs, it is important to ask “what is going on internally for this child? What are the types of demands that they are experiencing at the current time?”

This allows the parent to begin the process of adapting the situation to support the child.



**FIGURE 3.**  
**AN ILLUSTRATION FOR BOAS' CULTURAL GLASSES METAPHOR**

## Understanding the Impact of Personal and Cultural Contexts

Environmental factors outside the family may also play a role in the child's behaviour. For example, if the child is not feeling well in kindergarten because s/he struggles to play with other children, they may experience distress (that they do not know how to verbalise) and this may have an impact on the child's behaviour. As parents, it is important to **consider what may be going on in all the environments that are relevant to the child** (e.g. at home, in the community, in the kindergarten, or at other places).

Each person has their own personal and cultural history, developed through their experiences of childhood, with their families and with their communities. The anthropologist Franz Boas used first the metaphor of “cultural glasses”, implying that no one can perceive reality its full or in the same way as another human being. Each person's personal history impacts the “glasses” through which they view the world. (Boas, 1989)

When observing and making judgements about how challenging or acceptable a child's behaviour is, the adult is **always seeing the child through their own personal 'glasses'** which impacts on their response to that child. This – in turn – impacts on the child's behaviour and development. Children find themselves in many different situations and often, expectations of different environments (school, home and community) may not be the same. Sometimes, what appears to be challenging behaviour in the school environment may simply be the child behaving in accordance with accepted norms of their experiences in other environments. Likewise, the opposite is true.

### Factors influencing behaviour

- » biological: physical health, disability, genetic vulnerability, current state (fatigue, hunger)

FIGURE 4. FACTORS INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR

- » biological-psychological: temperament, intellect
- » psychological: self-esteem, coping skills, social skills, emotional regulation
- » psychological-social: family relationships, trauma
- » social: peer relationships, family circumstances and influences, school, environment, cultural influences, communication skills
- » social-biological: effects of drugs

Most children will demonstrate some challenging behaviours occur at some time or another. It is often difficult to distinguish when these behaviours are temporary or a symptom of a more serious problem. It is important to remember that – even if challenging behaviour is ultimately attributed to a more serious problem such as ADHD – the environment, family, and community effects are still essential to consider. Additional difficulties in these environments may create further challenges for the child who may already be struggling to cope.

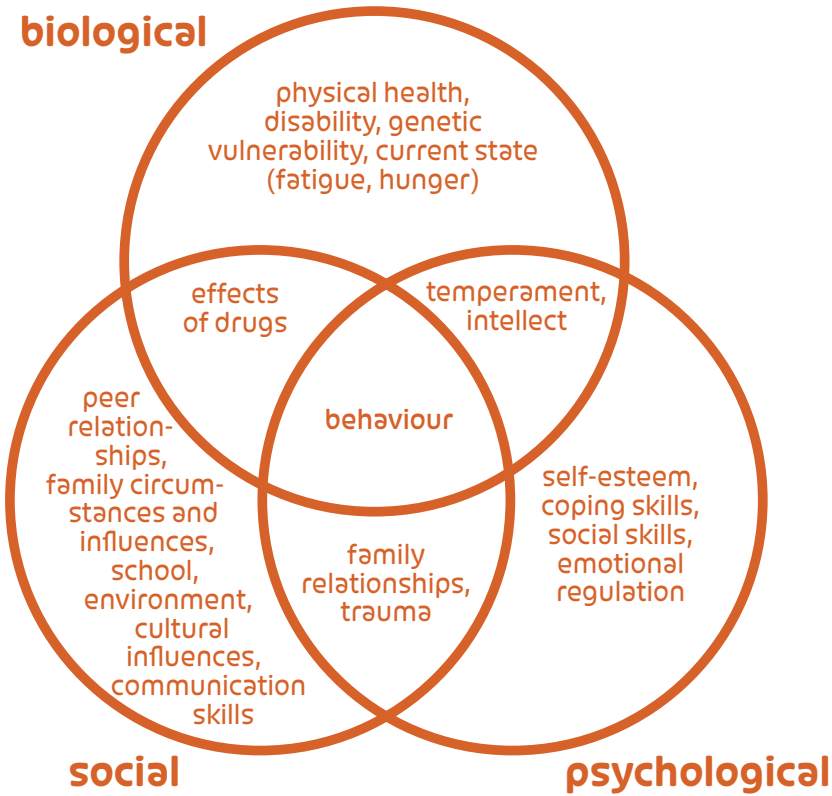
Competent professionals should decide whether the child's challenging behaviour is part of typical development patterns, normative responses to difficult circumstances, or a sign of a more significant developmental issue, such as ADHD. However, regardless of whether the child has a diagnosis or not, **parents and teachers are able to support children** as they develop the ability to regulate their behaviours and emotions.

### Test yourself:

- » Can you identify 6 types of challenging behaviour?



FIGURE 5. TOO MUCH STIMULATION CAN LEAD TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR



- » Can you identify 2 environmental causes of behaviour?
- » Can you identify 2 personal causes of challenging behaviour?

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2a What is ADHD?

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Recognize signs, symptoms and current medical views of ADHD in early childhood
- » Have an overview of the process of diagnosis and treatment for ADHD in early childhood

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder associated with **hyperactivity, impulsivity, and/or inattention**. Not all children with a diagnosis of ADHD have difficulties in all these areas, but all will struggle with at least one (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

ADHD is a **neurological developmental disorder**. This means that it is present from birth, and has associated neurological deficits or differences. ADHD may be linked with differences in brain development patterns, with some brain areas taking longer to develop than in typically developing children. ADHD is also often **associated with genetics**; it tends to run in families and be passed down to children from one or more family member. ADHD is one of the most common developmental disorder of early childhood, and occurs in approximately 5% of the population (Polanczyk et al., 2007). It is **three to four times more common in boys** than in girls. However, girls tend to have more difficulties with attention than hyperactivity, which may go unrecognised, and therefore undiagnosed. Girls may also not show any signs or symptoms until slightly later (Murray et al., 2019).

As we saw in the previous unit, development is complex, and so when we think about ADHD we need **to consider the contribution of a complex combination of factors**, including biology, psychology, and the social and environmental experiences of the child. While we are not able to change the biology of the child, we ARE able to change the child's environment, which can mean that there are less things that the child fails to cope with (e.g. a child with ADHD finds sitting still more difficult than others, so

we can shorten the amount of time that they are expected to do so). In this way, we can increase opportunities for learning and success and reduce the likelihood of difficulties often associated with ADHD in later life.

We know from years of research and practice with children with ADHD **that the earlier a child gets the help and support that they need**, the less likely he or she will have related problems later in life (Halperin et al., 2012).

How to recognise ADHD

ADHD refers to a group of challenging behaviours, with three types of ADHD acknowledged:

- » Predominantly inattentive
- » Predominantly impulsive/hyperactive
- » Combined type (including inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity)

Predominantly Inattentive Type ADHD

As you are reading this, there are many things happening around you – the background noises around you, the view from the window the things you have to do today. As you read about each of these things, it is likely that you turned your attention to them briefly and then turned your attention back to reading the words on the page.

There are lots of different types of attention, which all allow us to cope with the demands of day-to-day life. If we do not pay attention to the bus coming down the road when crossing the street, we would be in danger. If we do not pay attention to a friend when she speaks, she might not want to be our friend anymore. If we do not listen to our bosses, then we might not keep our job. As we get older, we must pay attention for longer and use attention to perform increasingly complex tasks. **Attention is different for all people**. In the case of typically developing children and adults, some people will have a strong attention



FIGURE 6. TYPES OF ADHD

span, while others may be a little more easily distracted (Czigler, 2005), but these different attention spans will not prevent them from participating in the things that they need to do.

### How do you know if your child is having difficulties with attention?

- » Overlooks or misses details, makes careless mistakes
- » Has problems sustaining attention during tasks or play time
- » Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- » Has problems organizing tasks and activities
- » Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort
- » Loses things necessary for tasks or activities
- » Is easily distracted by unrelated thoughts or stimuli
- » Cannot focus on a single activity
- » Gets bored before finishing the task
- » Has hard time listening to others, attention is distracted easily Does not follow through on instructions and processing information

### Predominantly Impulsive/Hyperactive Type ADHD

When a child does not seem able to stop and think about their actions, or seems to move or talk more or faster than other children, we might refer to these behaviours as impulsivity and hyperactivity. When it comes to ADHD, hyperactive-impulsive behaviours happen because the child has difficulty processing information as well as stopping an action. For example, a child may be playing with a jigsaw puzzle, when they see a bird outside the window. The child may jump up and run to the window, knocking the puzzle to the floor, not because the child planned to do so, but because the first time that they think about the action may be AFTER they have already done it. This is why, with children with ADHD-like behaviours, you may often find that **they are very sorry after they do something** because their actions were not intentional.

### How do you know if your child struggles with hyperactivity and impulsivity?

- » Fidgets with hands or feet and squirms in their seats
- » Leaves their seats in situations when staying seated is expected
- » Runs or dashes around or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate
- » Is unable to play or engage in hobbies quietly
- » Is constantly in motion or “on the go,” or acts as if “driven by a motor”
- » Talks nonstop

- » Blurts out an answer before a question has been completed, finishes other people's sentences, or speaks without waiting for a turn in conversation
- » Has trouble waiting his or her turn
- » Often interrupts or disturbs other during a conversation
- » Is very impatient with others
- » Makes inconsiderate comments
- » Struggles to control their emotions
- » Is prone to temper tantrums
- » Interrupts or intrudes on others, for example in conversations, games, or activities, rather than first asking if they can join
- » Is restless and squirms too much
- » Cannot sit still during activities like eating or reading
- » Resist doing controlled activities – fidgets and is reluctant to perform the task

### Other behaviours associated with ADHD in early childhood

There are other behaviours that are associated with ADHD in early childhood. These **are not part of the diagnostic criteria for ADHD**, but may be worth looking out for:

- » Aggressive behaviour during play
- » Absence of caution with strangers (friendly, occasionally helpful)
- » Too bold/careless
- » Poses danger to themselves or others with their carelessness and fearlessness
- » Lack of awareness of time
- » Find planning difficult
- » Problems going to sleep at night and/or have difficulty waking up
- » Problems making and keeping friends
- » Difficult relationships with adults
- » Do poorly in school, despite having ability and intelligence
- » May have motor or sensory difficulties (e.g. they may find it hard to sit upright for long periods of time).
- » Weak verbal and visual memory
- » Difficulties remembering series or sequences (e.g., days of the week, months).
- » Difficulties with listening and understanding speech
- » Disturbed speech, for example, recalling the correct word or stuttering

**Note of caution:** It is important to keep in mind that all of the behaviours listed above may be found in typically developing children during early childhood. These behaviours are only considered a “symptom” of ADHD if they are extreme or stronger than expected, if a large amount of them are present, or are very different from the typical behaviours of other children of the same age.

## Understanding Diagnosis and Treatment for ADHD

Prior to school age, any diagnosis of ADHD should be handled very carefully, as the presence of ADHD-like behaviours is not necessarily an indicator for ADHD. Kindergarten-aged children tend to move a lot and may appear to be somewhat hyperactive and they may often be easily distracted. This does not necessarily mean they have ADHD; it may mean that the skills required to manage their attention have not yet developed.

Most kindergarten children are able to maintain their attention for approx. 10 minutes, but children with ADHD tend to change their activities every few minutes (AAP, 2000). At this age, **a diagnosis of ADHD is only considered when the symptoms of extreme activity and impulsivity require continuous, constant monitoring to avoid injury.**

## The process of diagnosis

There is **no blood or biological test** to diagnose developmental disorders. Clinicians make judgements about a child's behaviour, often from discussions with those who spend a lot of time with the child and through comparisons with behaviours expected of other children of the same age and gender. So, as parents, you are likely to be closely involved in the diagnostic process, and may be asked questions or required to complete a questionnaire.

Diagnosis of ADHD is performed **by a trained clinician**, and depends on the individual child and the suspected disorder. The diagnosis process often involves:

- » observations (of the child in school or at home);
- » clinical interviews with parents and teachers;
- » teacher and parent questionnaires about behaviour.

**Getting a diagnosis doesn't do much good alone.** It may be needed so that the child gains access to treatment and those working with the child know what's going on and what they can do to help. Without the right kind of supports, children and families affected by ADHD can experience a lot of stress and long-term negative outcomes (e.g., divorce, low self-esteem, school failure, school dropout, risk behaviours like drugs and sex, etc.). However, ADHD is a very treatable condition and **with the right types of supports, children with ADHD can develop into successful adults.**

## Treatment options

Once a diagnosis of ADHD is given, many different types of treatments should be made available for the child and their parents. Treating the different symptoms of ADHD requires more than one professional and/or treatment – so that the child can learn to manage their ADHD and get on the road to success. Treatments / services usually target specific areas / behaviours.

**Typical treatments for ADHD include:**

- » Parent training
- » Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- » Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)
- » Occupational Therapy (OT)
- » Play Therapy
- » Anger Management (with the help of behaviour therapy)
- » Special Education Accommodations
- » Medication

This manual focuses on what can be done at home to support the needs of children with ADHD.

ADHD is not an illness or a disease, so is not “cured” by medication. For some children, **medication can help to manage some of their symptoms** in order to enable them to participate in learning. Although medication may be prescribed before the age of 5 in severe cases, medication is not usually given to children before they go to school.

This is why this manual refers to ADHD-like behaviour: a child may not YET have a diagnosis of ADHD, or may only demonstrate some of the symptoms, but may nonetheless cause difficulty for the child and their environment. The strategies and methods in later chapters can be applied in their case as well.

It is important to remember that **being told your child has ADHD may be difficult for you as parents.** When receiving a diagnosis, parents may experience a varied range of emotions, from sadness, to anger or relief and optimism. Whatever your reaction, remember that it is acceptable and it is important to make sense of and adapt to a new way of thinking about and living with your child.

## When to refer for diagnosis

It might be time to think about sending the child to a clinic for a diagnosis under the following circumstances:

- » the concerning behaviours have been on-going for an extensive period of time (e.g. 6 months or more)
- » the concerning behaviours do not match the child's developmental level (i.e. are notably different from other children of the same age)
- » the concerning behaviours are happening

across several situations and environments (e.g. at home and in school)

- » the concerning behaviours occur in several different kinds of relationships (e.g. parents, teachers, peers, siblings)
- » the concerning behaviours are relatively severe
- » the concerning behaviours harm the child's ability to get involved with and complete typical learning opportunities and developmental tasks (e.g. developing appropriate social relationships or pre-reading skills) (OCD, 2005)

### Test your knowledge:

- » What behaviours are typical of inattentive behaviour?
- » When is a challenging behaviour a cause for concern or when do we need to think about referring the child to diagnosis?
- » What is the role of the parent in the diagnostic process?

## 2b ADHD and Executive Functions

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand what executive functions are
- » Understand how executive functions develop
- » Understand how and why children with ADHD struggle with executive functions

### What are the executive functions?

Imagine that your child's birthday is in two weeks and you are planning a party. Think about all the things you need to do. First, you will have to decide what day the celebration will be on, the time and the place. Then you'll need to prepare and send out invitations to the right people, without forgetting anyone. You'll also need to figure out the menu, and plan the activities that the children will play. There is a lot to think about, plan, and do.

**FIGURE 7.**  
**EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS, LIKE A CONDUCTOR IN AN ORCHESTRA, ENSURE HARMONY**





To succeed at this task, **you need to use your executive functions. Executive functions are high level thinking skills that allow us to complete complex tasks.** In our party-planning example, our ability to organize, make decisions, prioritize, inhibit actions that are not important and find strategies to ensure that nothing is forgotten are all examples of executive functions.

To understand the concept of executive function, Brown (2013) gives us the metaphor of the “**conductor**” of the orchestra. Imagine the orchestra is the brain, the instruments are the different parts of the brain required for processing information. For example, the violin is the attention, the flute is attention, the drums are our emotions, and the piano is the memory system. To play a song (especially a very complex set of music like an opera) the orchestra needs direction – this is where the conductor comes in. The conductor tells the different systems (or instruments) when to come on, when to play nicely with another instrument, and when to stop. This conductor is the executive functioner, it does not affect the systems (like attention or memory) independently, but it does impact when they come on and how they work together. If the conductor of the orchestra is not working, then the violins come on in the middle of the flute’s solo. If the executive functions do not work, then a child can do something (like jump up for an activity to watch a cat outside the window) before they realise they have done it.

Executive functions begin to develop in the early years, go through a period of rapid development during adolescence, and are fully developed by young adulthood. Although not fully developed, a number of pre-executive functions are already apparent in early childhood. Since difficulties with executive functions are commonly associated with ADHD as children get older, it is important to understand how executive functions develop and what we can do to support pre-executive functions in early childhood. The following are examples of types of pre-executive functions:

- » **anticipation** - I know what happens after what and based on the signs I expect the event to happen (e.g. I hear the sound of plates and cutlery, so I know we’ll shortly have lunch)
- » **choice of goal** - I know what I want to achieve (e.g. I want to build a tower out of bricks)
- » **planning** - I think over what I want to do and how will I achieve it (e.g. I know that I don’t want the tower to fall so I place the bigger bricks on the bottom)
- » **short-term memory** - I keep in mind the information I need (e.g. an imaginary picture of the tower I am building)
- » **attention processes** - I focus on the things I need to focus on and ignore unnecessary information
- » **inhibition** – I don’t undertake behaviours that are not related to reaching of my goal

(e.g. I do not start playing with the truck I found in the box while looking for a cube)

- » **sort order** - understanding of succession (e.g. I first build the lower level of the tower, and only then begin the next one)
- » **cause and effect** – I know my behaviour has consequences (e.g., I don’t push the tower because I know it will fall down)
- » **pairing** – I can identify elements that belong together (e.g. I stacking cubes that fit together)
- » **start-stop processes** – I know when to stop one action and start another (e.g. I dig in the box to find a matching cube; once found, I stop searching and continue building);

Execution functions are therefore required to plan and make decisions, to identify and correct mistakes, to evaluate situations and apply the correct behaviour, to combine different types of information to allow goals to be achieved and to adapt behaviour flexibly to a changing environment.

Executive function allows the following **behavioural competences**:

- » purposeful behaviour;
- » focusing and maintaining attention;
- » planning and organization;
- » inhibition;
- » ignoring distractions;
- » selecting an appropriate strategy for problem solving;
- » self-monitoring, search for mistakes, monitoring (continuous self-monitoring);
- » flexibility;
- » change (i.e., one does not get stuck in the task but can quickly change tasks/strategy);
- » multitasking of parallel activities.

### ***Malfunctioning of the executive functions***

If the **development of executive functions is impeded** for any reason, consequences in everyday life may be:

- » forgetfulness;
- » distraction;
- » unable to sustain attention;
- » forgetting instructions (especially with multiple steps);
- » planning and completing a task (especially with multiple steps);
- » putting down and forgetting personal items;
- » interrupting or intruding on other people.

Differences in the development of executive functions are closely associated with ADHD. Although ADHD refers primarily to the problem of attention and activity, **the problem of executive functions may be what causes ADHD-like behaviour** (Barkley, 1997).

Unfortunately, however, children who demonstrate these behaviours are sometimes labelled as unmotivated, lazy, or rude, when in fact, under-developed executive functioning may be the source of the difficulty. It is important to recall in these instances that these behaviours are not intentional and should be met with **support and understanding as opposed to punishment**.

### Test yourself:

- » What are executive functions?
- » Name 3 executive function deficits and how they might impact on the day-to-day life of a child.

## 2c ADHD and the Environment

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Identify how – for all children – different types of learning environments might support or limit learning
- » Understand how common learning environments present particular challenges for children with ADHD-like behaviours

### Creating an Inclusive Environment

All child development is impacted by the environment. When we are working with children with differences in development, we need to create **an even more nurturing and supportive environment**. And we need to create an environment that supports these differences.

Research suggests that, without appropriate and professional support, people with ADHD

- » often drop out of school early, are less educated,
- » experience work-place problems (Young, Toone and Tyson, 2003),
- » are less popular among peers and have few friends (Neimeijer et al., 2008), and
- » their marriages frequently end in divorce (Young, Toone and Tyson, 2003).

In the early years, the brain develops at a tremendous rate and is particularly sensitive to environmental influences, while high levels of stress may harm development. So, **children need environments with:**

- » low stress levels
- » high levels of stimulation and challenges
- » emotional safety and security

Some behaviours which look like ADHD may occur as a response to extreme emotional stress, but are not ADHD. When a child experiences emotional turmoil or trauma (e.g. neglect, physical or sexual abuse, severe stress, family conflicts exposure to crime, violence, substance use, and chaotic living conditions) their executive functions may not develop in a typical fashion, and they may show ADHD-like signs (ADHD Institute, 2019).

It is very important to note, however, that **the environment does not “cause” ADHD, but it can trigger ADHD-like behaviours** or make pre-existing ADHD symptoms worse (Livingstone et al., 2016).

Also remember that **a child's ADHD diagnosis does not mean anything about the quality of parenting**. It is unhelpful for parents to think in terms of 'blame'. One approach to supporting children with ADHD is to think of them as “wired differently” and to find ways to create supportive environments.

If a small child is not exposed to physical or other negative effects, their executive skills are beginning to develop and grow from birth to adulthood.

It is important that parents are aware of ADHD, **are able to identify** if their child needs support, and know **how best to support** children with ADHD-like behaviours. All children require attention, but children with ADHD-like behaviours need support, patience, attention, and understanding even more so. For the child with ADHD, we cannot underestimate the importance of their physical, social and sensory environments (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Many aspects of the environment may be difficult for a child with ADHD-like behaviours to deal with, perhaps

**FIGURE 8. „THEY ARE WIRED DIFFERENTLY”**

due to demands that highlight particular areas of difficulties. So, it is important to consider the environment and the characteristics of the activities that they are being asked to complete.

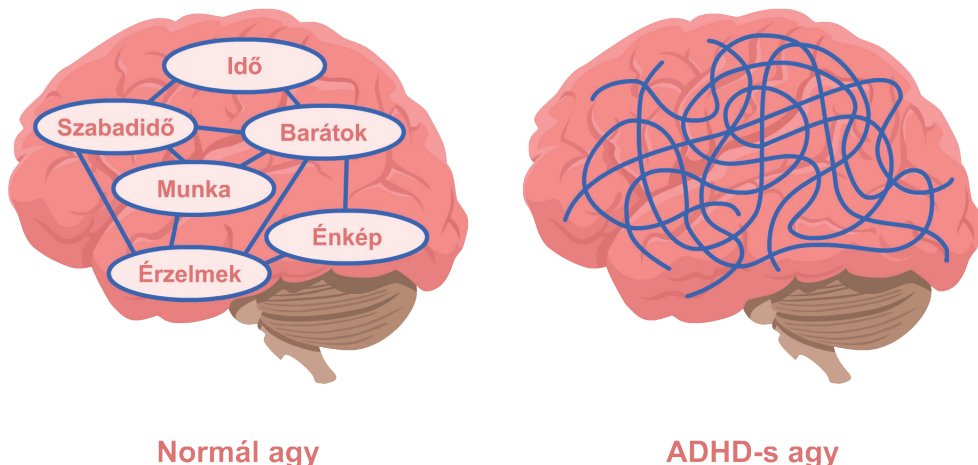
Some examples of things that **children with ADHD-like behaviours may struggle with:**

- » Behavioural expectations (e.g., how long must the children sit quietly for, how much movement is there, what is considered “good” or “appropriate” behaviour).
- » A lot of stimuli in the physical environment (e.g. objects, noise, smell, etc.)
- » The type of activities or the way an activity is structured. For example, does the activity require the child to plan and enact a plan, does it rely on memory (e.g., do you give instructions verbally or do you expect the child to remember how they did something before), are there multiple steps involved in the activity or the instructions (e.g. complex board games)
- » Understanding and responding to social situations (e.g. agreeing to play a game that a friend prefers)
- » Emotionally provocative events (e.g. another child snatches their toy)

### Changing your glasses and Behavioural Expectations:

In unit 1, we talked about how we all see the world, the child, and behaviour through our own cultural glasses. These can be biased and based on what we think is important. When considering the environments we create for children with ADHD-like behaviours, we want to make sure that we check in with ourselves and ask ourselves:

- » ‘Is this behaviour challenging’?
- » ‘Are my expectations ‘fair’?
- » ‘What kinds of behaviours do I value or expect’?
- » ‘What behaviours are expected in the child's home / culture’ (if there is a mismatch between what is expected at home and in school, then this creates challenges for the child who has to navigate both)?



### Test yourself:

- » In what way can ADHD be influenced by the environment?
- » What aspects of the environment may be difficult for a child with ADHD-like behaviour?
- » Why is structure so important for children with ADHD-like behaviour?



## 2d Strength-Based Approaches to Understanding ADHD

*"In special education, there's too much emphasis placed on the deficit and not enough on the strength."  
(Temple Grandin)*

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand what a strengths-based approach is in early childhood settings
- » Identify strengths commonly associated with children who demonstrate ADHD-like behaviours

### What is a strengths-based approach?

As its name implies, a strength-based approach suggests that **all people have strengths**, and these are the building blocks to healthy development. A strengths-based approach does not think about development in terms of just survival, but rather focuses on positive attributes which support children to grow into "thriving" young people and adults.

The core of strength-based education is that

- » educators themselves first discover their own skills and strengths and then
- » use these to recognize children's skills to support their learning (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

The strengths-based approach believes that we need to identify what is good and positive about the person. The aim is to enhance development and to **use strengths to overcome difficulties**, and requires us to focus on strengths rather than difficulties. So, for children with ADHD-like behaviours, this approach encourages us to focus on what the child is good at, **what they like to do**, and who they might become. These will be the activities they will be able to perform at a high level, and which will support the development of self-esteem and willingness to try new things. This approach does not deny that the existence of challenges, but **focuses on techniques to recognize what works for the individual child, and which strategies need to be further developed**.

To adopt a strengths-based approach, it is important to remember:

- » The learning process of children, and how they gain experience of the world, is dynamic and complex
- » Children learn and develop in different ways
- » Focus on what exists (as opposed to what is absent)
- » Find what works well for the individual child
- » When children and their educators (parents and kindergarten teachers) recognize and

appreciate their individual strengths, the child is empowered and supported to learn and develop

So, we should **ask the following questions**:

- » What is working in our home environment?
- » When is my child able to show their best side (and what's going on)?
- » What tasks or activities does the child complete without difficulty?
- » What does the child love to do?
- » What is the child good at?

Strength exists at **two levels**.

- » Internal strengths exist at the level of the child, which can be a characteristic, trait, attributes, skill, tendency, behaviour, belief, etc.
- » External strengths exist within the child's environment, which can include things like social relationships, services, resources, community, faith-based group or faith, etc.

**Both internal and external strengths are important.** By recognizing them, **parents can support** the social and emotional development, as well as motivation, self-esteem, and well-being.

### ADHD-Related Strengths

Many behaviours characteristic of ADHD can be viewed as strengths when viewed from a different perspective. Some of these may include (de Schipper et al., 2015):

- » Creativity
- » Energetic
- » Seeing the world in a different way
- » Exciting and fun to be around
- » Flexibility and spontaneity
- » Multi-tasking
- » Resilience
- » Risk takers

In addition, it is worth considering the characteristics of our home and family that support the child with ADHD in their development. These include factors such as:

- » parent / sibling also diagnosed with ADHD;
- » positive, supportive, caring parent-child relationship;
- » positive communication between the family and kindergarten teachers;
- » the ability of parents to see their child's behaviour in a positive way (e.g. enthusiastic rather than hyperactive);
- » social support (e.g. grandparents actively helping);
- » use of structures and routines;
- » patience, concessions;
- » a positive release of energy (for both children and adults, e.g. running).

## Test your knowledge

- » **What is a strength-based approach?**
- » **List three strengths associated with ADHD!**

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This unit explores **practical strategies to support children with ADHD-like behaviours at home, including creating supportive environments and adopting strengths-based strategies.**

Start off by reading through the sections to gain an understanding of the approaches and then decide **which areas you want to target** and what strategies you want to adopt.

This manual is designed to support you in your home, bearing in mind that you are the expert about your child.

**Use this manual with a “pick and mix” approach.** Remember, a key principle to long term change or skill development is to **start small and go slow**. If we try and do everything all at once, we end up doing nothing. So, focus on what is a priority or a few priorities for you and your home.

3a Strengths-based approaches

Learning Outcomes:

- By the end of this section, you will:
- » Develop strategies to identify the strengths of children, their families and their environments when faced with ADHD-like behaviours
  - » Be able to apply strength-based approaches when supporting the development of a child with ADHD-like behaviours
- As we read in Unit 2, the strength-based approach is a framework that can support our working with children. There are different approaches to strengths-based working. Here we will explore identifying strengths, using strengths and creating a safe emotional environment.

Identifying strengths

In order to apply a strength-based approach, we need to identify the child's strengths, so that we can harness the positive attributes that can be built upon, whether these are within the child or their environment.

Changing your glasses

Applying the strength-based approach, we can change our glasses and consider many behaviours that are typically seen as challenging in a different light. For example, we can see a behaviour as “hyperactive-impulsive,” or we can see a child who has lots of energy, is interested and curious, and is willing to get involved.

Using the space below, list all the words you think about when you think about “ADHD” (we covered a lot of these above) and try to reframe the characteristics in a positive strengths-based light. We have done the first few for you.

What do you associate with ADHD?	What is this in terms of strengths?
Hyperactive	Lots of energy
Impulsive	Interested in everything
Talks too much	
Lack of self-control	
Difficult to make friends	

TABLE 1. CHANGE YOUR GLASSES WHEN LOOKING AT ADHD!

**Strengths** are not only about internal strengths, they **can also be in the environment**. Think about your child. Can you list some of the external strengths the child has?

Child's name	
What strengths ...	
... are there at home? (e.g. positive relationship with mother)	
... are there in the community? (e.g. grandparents are close by)	
... are there during group activities? (e.g. loves to paint)	
... are there in the social environment of the school? (e.g. has a very good friend)	
.... are there the educational environment? (e.g. good relationship with the kindergarten teacher)	

TABLE 2. OBSERVE AND NOTE THE STRENGTHS OF THE CHILD

## Creating a safe emotional environment

All children need a safe emotional environment. But given the challenges children with ADHD-like behaviours experience, the negative experiences, challenges regulating their emotions, and feeling out of control, it is especially important that they are provided with care and emotional nurturing.

### Some key principles:

- » Accept the child for who they are
- » Give them praise and opportunities to feel like they are capable and successful
- » Provide positive feedback and rewards
- » Use clear and consistent communication
- » Enjoy shared experiences
- » Demonstrate thoughtful, considerate behaviour

### Accepting the child

If I asked you to tell me why you became a parent, what would you say? Before your child was born, you likely imagined the kind of child you would have and the joy you would get from them. However, the day to day reality of raising a child may often be very different from what we expected, which may be even more apparent when raising a child with ADHD-like behaviours.

There are two things to remember here.:

- » First, these children need our understanding; their behaviour is not intentional.
- » Second, it is often the children who challenge us who are the ones who need us most. Children with ADHD-like behaviours are often misunderstood and rejected; parents are the most important source to provide support for their needs.

When we accept a child, we find it easy to pay them positive attention. **If we accept that their ADHD-related challenges are a real difficulty for them**, then we are more likely to provide them with the support they need. All positive change happens in the context of a positive relationship, and the start to all positive relationships is understanding, acceptance, and love.

How can we create the **emotional security** the child needs?

- » Make the child feel cared about.
- » Emphasize his/her strengths.
- » Tell him/her that he/she is important to you.
- » Engage him in as many activities as possible. Time and attention are the greatest gift a child can receive.
- » Communication is key: Allow the child to ask questions, take time to answer and to ask questions in return, and listen to they have to say.

- » Encourage them and believe in them. 'I know you can do it'
- » Make sure you create opportunities for success and enable them to learn new things.
- » Be authentic: If you make a mistake own up to it / be honest. If the child makes a mistake, be patient with them, they will learn from these mistakes.
- » Recognise and draw the children's attention to beautiful, interesting things - find them in everything and everyone.
- » Keep your sense of humour and laugh a lot
- » Take care of another creature: Have a pet or a plant, which the children can take care of.

## Start with what they are capable of - the first steps in increasing self-esteem

To increase self-esteem, teachers need to be aware of the strengths and positive qualities of a child with challenging / ADHD behaviour. A child's strengths can include, for example:

- » curious, interested;
- » creative, characterized by unique ideas, games and problem solving;
- » shows deep interest in certain topics (that are interesting, important to him / her);
- » sensitive, increased need for love;
- » enthusiasm for doing certain things with great energy and vigour;
- » be able to inspire other children;
- » have a good sense of humour;
- » risk-taker, driven by discovery, curiosity;
- » affectionate;
- » has good organizational skills.

By observing and mapping the child's strengths you can not only boost their confidence, but it can also be a **useful tool** in solving challenging behaviours. What we focus on or where we start to work, will be the starting point for the child. **The starting point should be what they can do** (not what they cannot do or what they are not good at). Challenges then become opportunities to explore. If you start them off having experiences of success, then it's something to build on and creates hope, motivation and optimism for the child.

**FIGURE 9.**  
**AGE-APPROPRIATE,**  
**COMPETENT TASK:**  
**WATERING THE PLANTS**





Jimmy, 5 years old, hard to maintain his attention he has motor restlessness/is fidgety	Suggestions for interventions, supportive environment for Jimmy
Being aware of strengths	Recognise his strengths! He makes other people laugh, invents exciting stories, able to origami many kinds of airplanes
Positive role model	His role model is his father, with whom he often fixes things at home
Assistive technology, universal learning environment	Emphasizing daily routines e.g. a musical signal indicates the change of activity; rewarding system if he has been persistent in a task-work (receive airplane parts so at the end he can exhibit the machine in the group), no one should sit right next to him during activities so he can concentrate more, and he can sit on a balancing sphere so micro movements help him focus his attention and release his mobility.
Strength based learning strategies	Tasks matching his interest (nature), taking part in group tasks
Enhancing human resources	“Assistant parent” role: helping the smaller children, telling stories, fixing broken gadgets
Strengthening positive view of the future	Strengthening self-confidence, helping to find the proper school

TABLE 3. EXAMPLES FOR INTERVENTION AND CREATING AND SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENT

Positive Outcomes:

When identifying areas for development, you **focus on positive attributes and skills** (emotional, social, etc.), self-confidence, connectedness (healthy relationship to family, friends and community), caring and compassion.

Gratitude exercises

People who keep being grateful for things in their lives are more **optimistic**, less depressed, less lonely and experience more positive emotions. This is especially important for children with ADHD.

Parents should also practice gratitude exercises while teaching them to the children.

Parents can start by writing a **list of 3-5 things** he/she is grateful for. In the next step, **explain why you are grateful** for these. A very high level of gratitude is when you write a letter to someone who has made a profound, positive change in your life. The next step is to hand over this letter to him that person.

There are several ways we can introduce the concept of gratitude to children:

- » We can integrate it into daily activities (for example, at dinner – the whole family can join! OR we can ask the children to say something they are grateful at bedtime): WHAT are you grateful for and WHY?
- » Gratitude Tree (you can hang on it thanksgiving letter);
- » Gratitude jar (the whole family can collect in jar using small pieces of paper what they are grateful for, this jar can be opened time-to time and read, maybe together on a festive evening)
- » Gratitude collage or other artwork
- » Unexpected good deeds - think together about ideas that children can do for others, to help others - and then you can talk about how they noticed that it is needed /it causes joy to the other, and how did it feel)
- » Teach them to say thank you for things
- » At storytelling: Read them books about gratitude (Positive Psychology, 2019)

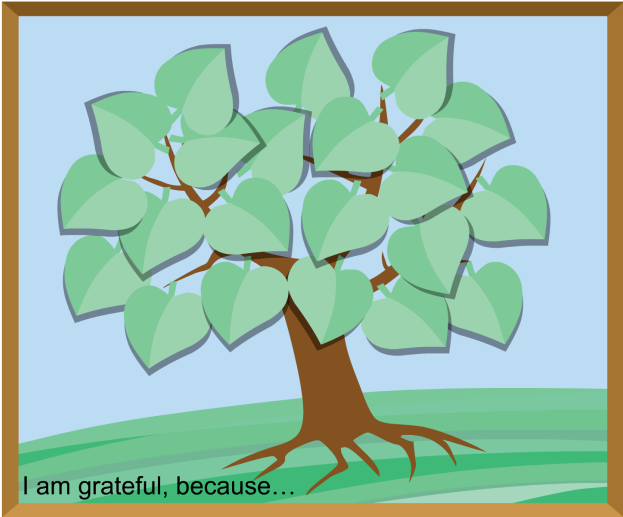


FIGURE 10. GRATITUDE-TREE

### Meditation, mindfulness

Meditation helps children to calm down and concentrate, **helps manage their feelings**, and increase their self-confidence. Meditation is the **conscious control of attention**.

There are **countless meditation practices** that can be tested even with 2-3 years old children.

- » Smelling (Fragrance Meditation): Collect odorous objects from the garden and from the kindergarten- be it flower blossom, spicy, sweet, etc. (eg caraway seeds, ground coffee, lemon, mint, lavender, usual hand wash soap, toothpaste, etc.). Blindfold the children's eyes, then ask him to describe the scents - and at the end maybe recognise it as well.
- » Nature-meditation: during a walk, or in the yard, call children's attention to the sounds of nature (or of the big city) and listen to the smells and lights and shadows.
- » Breathing-Meditation: We will speak about the importance of breathing later when we will speak about emotional regulation. Get some feathers of birds, or make a paper pinwheel with the kids. One of their hands is holding the pinwheel, the other one is placed on their belly. They take a deep breath. As they exhale slowly they observe how the pinwheel rotates and how the belly moves to feel the air inflow and outflow.



**FIGURE 11. MEDITATION HAS COUNTLESS BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN**

### Teach the rules (step by step) to children and help them to adhere to them.

(Massachusetts Medical Society, 2000.)

Steps must be taken together several times until they learn them. Take the time to remind the child of every step, and do not do it instead of him, and do not be angry if he does not succeed at the beginning. At first, it will take some time to accomplish a task, but that is not a problem. We praise each step completed, which will increase the child's self-confidence.

- » For example, helping the morning routine
- » Bring your clothes here ... Thank you.

» All right, get off your pyjamas ... Good job!

» Now put on your shirt ... You managed it very quickly!

### Spend quality time with your child!

There should be time every day when we are exclusively with the child, paying attention to them. Switch off the TV, stop doing chores, and focus on the child. Allow the child to choose what to play, inventing the rules of the game. We can find many reasons to praise them during play:

- » What a great tower you built!
- » I truly enjoyed playing pirates with you!

### Self-care

A big part of adopting a strengths-based approach, is having parents who are well supported and take care of their own wellbeing. So, tapping into your own strengths, taking care of your wellbeing, and getting support is essential.

### Test yourself

- » Can you name 3 strengths associated with ADHD?
- » What are the key components to creating a safe emotional environment?
- » How are you going to take care of yourself?

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Be familiar with how to change the home and other environments for the child with ADHD-like behaviours to suit their needs
- » Be able to apply the basic principles of structuring the environment effectively
- » Be able to develop boundaries and expectations for your child's behaviour

All children need the right type of home environment to support their development. This section provides information about how to create a supportive nurturing home environment for your child.

A nurturing structured environment:

A structured nurturing environment requires awareness and use of strengths, strength-based learning strategies, positive relationships and age appropriate communication. For children with ADHD-like behaviours, some key components of a nurturing structured environment include:

- » Structure
- » Flexibility
- » Assistive technologies (e.g. visual aids, daily routine, timers)
- » Suitability and adaptation of environmental factors
- » High yet realistically achievable expectations

While all children need clear structure and boundaries, this is particularly true for children with ADHD-like behaviour. A structured nurturing environment refers to the physical space, the order and timing of activities, routines, how activities are introduced, how transitions are managed, boundaries and expectations, and how these are communicated to the child.

When we provide consistent structure, rules, habits, routines, reminders, and boundaries, we provide children with ADHD-like behaviour opportunities to learn and cope with the challenges they face. Make use of charts and organisation systems. These should depend on the child and the situation – so be creative and personalise it in line with the child's interests. **Visual aids** and prompts (photographs, pictograms, humorous drawings, and flow charts) can help to focus attention, keep track of time, and structure time.

For example, by structuring the day and following clear routines, the child with

ADHD-like behaviours can track events and recognize what comes after what. In this way, we structure the environment to support children who have not fully developed their planning skills and make their lives more predictable (thus providing emotional security too). Modifying and adjusting the external environment can support the development of the child, but make sure not to over-structure the child's environment, so that they have choice and the ability to make decisions about what they do.

Physical environment

The physical environment refers to the physical spaces around us. This includes buildings and rooms, the objects and materials in them, how spaces are arranged and decorated (e.g., seating, carpet), what it looks, smells and sounds like, and how it is heated and lighted – these can all have an impact on the experience of a child with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours. The physical environment can provide stimulation for growth but some aspects can also be overwhelming for some children. Creating a structured nurturing environment means paying attention to these



OPEN THE TAP



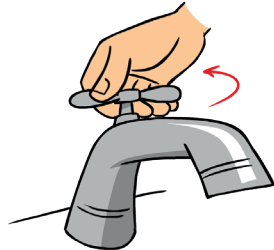
WATER YOUR HANDS



SOAP YOUR HANDS



WASH YOUR HANDS



CLOSE THE TAP



DRY YOUR HANDS

FIGURE 12. A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HAND-WASHING HELPS THE CHILD WITH EACH STEP



**FIGURE 13. IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING NICE FOR A CHILD, GIVE THEM AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN TOUCH THINGS AS MUCH AS THEY WANT**

things and making changes based on the needs of the individual children in your home. As you know, young children will often want to explore all aspects to their environment and safety needs to come first. If there is a child with ADHD-like behaviours in your home, try to develop a well-structured physical layout. A cluttered, narrow, or disorganised space can be difficult to manage for children with ADHD-like behaviours so try to minimise these situations.

**Organisation of material - A place for everything and everything in its place:**

When organising the objects in your home (e.g., child's room, sitting room, kitchen) remember that a structured environment is in itself a reassuring factor for your child. A lot of toys mean a lot of stimulation, which may cause distraction. If there are fewer toys in the sight of the child with ADHD-like behaviours, they may be able to concentrate more and will be distracted less. If they have too many choices, they might be overwhelmed (Dauch et al., 2018).

Toys and other materials should have their own place. Large storage boxes and baskets are helpful, because they show the child clearly where the item goes. Try to develop the simplest organisation plan (boxes with photos of what belongs inside, or cupboards with clearly labelled shelves) and keep items to a minimum. Encourage the child to help with keeping objects organized. We want the child to be stimulated and be able to explore new things and play with a variety of objects. However, try to keep these organised and it will help them order their inner world and outer world.



**Make the concept of 'time' understandable (physical and visual):**

Children with ADHD-like behaviour can often struggle to understand and manage time. You can provide **points of reference in the environment to structure time**. Indicate how long and/or how many times we are doing something and what will happen next. For example, you may have a schedule, using pictures or photographs, that show the sequence of activities on a day or during a particular time period (e.g., what happens when they come home from kindergarten or what do they need to do to get ready in the morning?). You can use a kitchen timer or hourglass to physically demonstrate the passage of time. For example, if you want them to do a particular activity for 3 minutes, you might put three minutes on an egg timer beside them as they work.

**Managing stimuli**

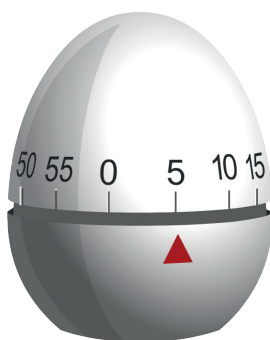
Children with ADHD-like behaviours can be particularly sensitive to the influence of sounds, scents, lights and other people in the environment. For some children with ADHD-like behaviour, this is especially difficult because they seek certain types of sensory input as a means of managing their sensory experiences. Without careful observation, we cannot know what type of stimulation is challenging for the child, and what type of stimulation is helpful for them.

When thinking about the impact of sensory experiences on behaviour, it's important to remember that all children process sensory information differently.



**FIGURE 14. CREATE A CLEAR SYSTEM AT HOME TO STORE TOYS**

FIGURE 15.  
THERE ARE SEVERAL TOOLS  
TO TRACK TIME, E.G.  
KITCHEN TIMER



You might have read about popular sensory activities that are recommended, but very often, something ‘popular’ might actually make things worse for the specific child. It’s key that any **sensory intervention is personalised** to the specific sensory needs of the individual child.

However, broad principles suggest that there are some things that we can and should pay particular attention to, to support the child with ADHD-like behaviour.

#### Some ideas for reducing stimuli:

- » Pay attention to noise levels and reduce it when it starts to get too loud. For example, you can have a signal for all children (e.g. ringing a bell or switching on a lamp) that it is getting too loud and they need to work/play more quietly. This supports children who are sensitive to the noise in their environment.
- » Speak to the child. Ask them which sensations they like and which they don’t – and then respect their answer.
- » Reduce the number and/or duration of situations that overstimulate the child
- » Provide quiet periods. Try and built into the day as an informal signal or normal routine a quiet calm place where the child can go to calm down.
- » “Take-a-break spot” (e.g. quiet corner, chill out space, time out): If a child appears to be overwhelmed, we can provide him with a safe place, time and rest for a short while, alone or with another person (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent).

#### Back to nature!

For children with ADHD-like behaviours, being outside in nature can reduce ADHD-like behaviours, provide an outlet for hyperactivity and improve attention. Get children outside and back to nature. For example, go for a nature walk, run in a grassy area, or have them play in a mud kitchen. (Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2011).

## Routines

A key part of a structured nurturing environments is routine. Children with ADHD-like behaviour need structure and struggle with transitions. So, create routines for the morning, evening, and eating will support them.

#### Establishing routines:

- » Work with your child to plan a routine: Sit together with your child and talk about whatever time you are planning a routine for. Let’s take the example of a morning routine.
- » Brainstorm: Together you can brainstorm all the activities that need to be done before you leave the home (getting up, toilet, breakfast, dressing, face washing, brushing teeth, packing bag, etc.).
- » Plan: figure out the order they need to be done in and how long it will take to do these. Discuss together the order in which these things should be done.
- » Create a visual: make a visual schedule and place it somewhere the child can see – this can be visual and/or written.

FIGURE 16.  
A VISUAL TIMER



- » Reward: You can get the child involved (when they are able to do this) by checking off each task as it is complete. Once they have all or some tasks completed, they get a reward. In the beginning, reward for partial completion and then increase expectations as the child learns the routine.
- » At the beginning, help with each step. Gradually, reduce your involvement and allow the child to take more and more responsibility.
- » Be consistent, routines work best when they happen every day. It may be that once in a while a routine is not possible, and this is normal, but efforts should be made to have routine as often as possible. Only once it becomes a part of your home’s day-to-day life, will you see the most benefits.

FIGURE 17. EXAMPLE FOR A MORNING ROUTINE



### Morning routines

Mornings can be chaotic time for children with ADHD-like behaviours.

A good morning routine helps, because a routine once established means that there are less demands on the child (e.g., they do not have to plan for what to do next, manage their time) and can reduce emotional arousal.

### Evening routines

There are several evening routines you might like to try within your home: dinner / meals, bedtime, or chores.

*Bedtimes can be particularly challenging for children with ADHD-like behaviours:*

Some children with ADHD struggle to sleep. A routine for how to relax and get ready for bed may support children with ADHD-like behaviours sleep better.

Have a bedtime and start to get ready for bed a set amount of time before this. The amount of time depends on what you do in your home at night. For example, it could be 30 minutes or if your child/children bath at night then it could be 90 minutes.

Try to do as much as possible the night before (e.g., pack bags), to make the morning go more smoothly.

Try to limit or reduce the amount of stimuli the child is exposed to before bedtime (e.g., turn off technology or stop energetic games well before they start to get ready for bed).

FIGURE 18. EXAMPLE FOR AN EVENING ROUTINE



If your child struggles to get to sleep a bedtime ritual can help (e.g., reading a story, chatting about their day, deep breathing or other relaxation exercise) while in bed can relax or sooth the child.

### Chores

Getting involved and taking responsibility for things at home, such as cleaning or shopping, provides children with the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for independence. Having chores or being responsible for things can support the development of executive functions. It also can make the child feel like a valued member of the family, which can support the development of their self-esteem.

- » Always consider age, interest, skills, when decided what chores your child will do. Break the chore down into easy manageable steps and support your child while they work towards completion. As the child develops, you can make the chores more complicated and they can do them more independently.
- » Allow for choice and control, by getting the child involved in what chores they will do and when they do them.
- » A child should have responsibility from very early ages. Try not to do for a child what they can do for themselves.





**FIGURE 19.**  
**LET THE CHILD**  
**PICK AGE-APPRO-**  
**PRIATE CHORES**  
**AND LET THEM**  
**CHANGE THEM**  
**TIME-TO-TIME**

Some examples of tasks based on age:

- » A 2-3 years old child can put their dirty clothes in a laundry basket before bathing. Later, they can take the clothes from the dryer and put it away in their wardrobe (you can support this with a visual system for organisation). After eating, a child can put their dirty dishes in the sink and wipe the table or wipe up spilled drink. They can pick up their toys, dust, or tidy away clothes.
- » A 4-5 years old can set the table for dinner, they can clean up after a meal, help with cooking, put away groceries, water the flowers, help with bed linen, sort out the laundry, make a simpler snack, fold the towels, make their bed, and feed the pet.

### How to appoint chores?

The easiest, if the family prepares a chart here, too, with all the tasks, and the family divides who is doing what out of these.

## Setting Boundaries and Expectations

A part of creating a structured nurturing environment is thinking about the boundaries or expectations set for behaviour in the home.

Boundaries and expectations help to create an atmosphere that supports learning and development, teaching the child skills (especially about independence, self-control, and social skills). While the child's executive functions are still not developed, boundaries and expectations will support them in making good choices. Boundaries and expectations should not be about con-

trol, but should rather focus on providing structure and scaffolding for children while they learn. Rather than focusing on enforcement of rules, try to encourage exploration within the boundaries.

Boundaries and expectations work best when they are developed collaboratively with the child. When doing so, the parent or caregiver may need to explain why certain behaviours are important (e.g. they may need to explain sequences of events, cause and effect, etc.) and may need to repeat explanations. As the child develops more skills, the parent / caregiver can step back and allow the child to solve problems and suggest new rules themselves.

Good boundaries do not limit the child's freedom, but serve as handrails to them, so the child knows what to expect. Of course, this does not mean that you have to stick rigidly to a set routine or lack flexibility when it comes to behavioural expectations, but clear guidelines, with open discussion of any exceptions support a sense of control and stability for the developing child.

### How to set group boundaries and expectations:

Boundaries and expectations will be different for every home. You will need to figure out what the priorities are for your home.

- » Think about the cultural expectations of your home and wider community. There can be differences between cultures at home and in school. Be aware of what is expected at school, so that you can support your child to be ready for these when the time comes.
- » Think about the needs of the individual children: Observe and note when, where, and why children struggle with certain behaviours.

Boundaries and expectations should be based on needs (i.e., what do the children need to learn to manage specific situations).

#### Creating boundaries and expectations:

- » **Brainstorm:** First brainstorm what behaviours are most desirable and most challenging.
- » **Priorities:** Define a list of priorities. Start with the most important one or two. Over time, introduce more expectations.
- » **Set Good Expectations:** Whatever your priority, make sure it is identified as a positive/desirable behaviour. For example, rather than saying “do not hit your brother” you might say “always be kind to others”. Remember, we are teaching behavioural skills.
- » **Set Boundaries:** Identify what is meant when the child does not achieve the expectation and what the consequence will be. For example, if the expectation is “always be kind to others”, what does “being kind” look like and what does not being kind look like (remember, we must be clear with the child). What will happen if/when the child is not being kind? A logical consequence when a child hits, is that the child must apologise and listen to how the behaviour impacted the other child.
- » **Explain:** Get your child or children and explore what’s going on in your home, try to get them involved in identifying why it is a problem and see if they can come up with any solutions. Next, introduce the new boundary/expectation, and explain “why” the behaviour is important for everyone (you can explore this idea with the children too). You can have a sign or visual image, which will help this discussion and then you can put it on the wall in your home.
- » **Remind:** Learning new behaviours happens over time. You may need to remind the child of the rule.

#### What is a good set of expectations/boundaries?

- » Simple, understandable, clear, obvious
- » Achievable: think age, ability, and what is realistic for children with ADHD-like behaviours
- » Consistent: boundaries and expectations only work if you stick to them, for the children they must be predictable.
- » Well considered
- » Respectful (of children and adults)
- » Gives the child freedom within limits
- » Have a few clear boundaries and expectations (less is more)

- » **Flexibility:** This happens in two ways. First, they need to be reviewed as necessary. Second, in a given moment, the parent / caregiver needs to figure out how to respond. While consistency is important, it's also worth remembering that the goal is to teach skills. When using them be flexible and think about giving the child options and chances to choose the right behaviour (László, 1997).

If children already know what the expectations and boundaries are, and they are not following them, you need to **gentle remind them** of the boundaries and what's expected of them. In the beginning, you will need to give a lot of guidance and support, because they will take time to learn and remember.

#### Dealing with transitions

ADHD is linked with difficulties regulating attention, prioritizing, and flexibility. As a result, children with ADHD-like behaviours can find it difficult during transitions (e.g. arriving at school, coming home, shifting between tasks or activities) or when unexpected changes occur. To avoid difficulties with transitions, try to provide structure and **clearly communicate plans** (e.g. what will happen this morning), in order to help the child with ADHD-like behaviours prepare for transition.

For example, you know that it is 5 minutes to 6, which is dinnertime, so you need to prepare the child who struggles with transitions. You might tell everyone in your home at the time that they need to clean up and wash their hands as it is nearly dinnertime. You might then give the child with ADHD-like behaviours a specific reminder of what they have to do.

#### Limit amount of time on IT devices

Try to reduce or limit the amount of screen time your child has (e.g., watching TV and usage of electronic gadgets, videogames, laptops, tablets, mobile phones).

Sometimes children with ADHD-like behaviours find it hard to sleep. So, try not to have any screen time before bedtime – make this part of the routine (e.g., 1 hour before bedtime devices are all turned off).

Have a gadget plan for your family, for example, how much time are people allowed to watch TV (e.g., one program per day), when do you use smartphone (e.g., one show or as a reward) and when do you not (e.g., none during meals).

Test your knowledge:

- » What strategies do you know for structuring the environment?
- » What type of routine do you need to develop for your child and how will you do it?
- » What type of chores will your child do in your home?
- » What are boundaries and expectations? How will you do this in your home?

### 3c Executive function

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand the development of executive functions for children with ADHD or ADHD-like behaviour
- » Be able to apply your understanding of executive function to support children with ADHD-like behaviours

As introduced in Unit 2, executive functions are high level thinking skills that allow us to complete complex tasks. Some children with ADHD-like behaviours struggle with executive functions (e.g. attention, planning, memory), which can impact on their behaviour. This section explores how you can develop pre-executive function skills in early childhood.

#### Developing pre-executive function skills:

There are many opportunities to develop the pre-executive functions of the children in your home. Indeed, the development of executive function is part of the natural processes of development, especially at home and it happens as children interact with family members, gets involved with chores, and socialises in the wider community. If we tune in to these natural processes, we can come up with strategies to target and develop them further, although some children will need extra support to do this.

- » Identify: Begin by observing the child and try to identify behaviours that are linked to executive functions. Below is a table that you can use to observe the child. Once you have identified executive function related behaviours, take some time to observe these behaviour(s) over time (at different times of day and different days).
- » Develop: Once you have identified a behaviour you want to develop, try to be creative in terms of its development. Development may involve some of the ideas below, you can also think in terms of structures and supports.

#### Games and Activities Supporting the Development of Pre-Executive Function Skills

(Based on Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014, 2015)

Supporting children who struggle with planning, organisation, time management, sequencing, and attention can involve providing structures and support (e.g., a visual timetable, support with organisation). You can also develop pre-executive function skills in all children through activities and games, many of which you already use in your kindergarten. Any activity which requires planning, organisation, and memory can be helpful. As we said earlier, these happen in the normal course of a home. Understanding this can enable you to tune in and understand why the child struggles with specific tasks and so come up with strategies to work with it and develop these skills. For example, getting the child to tidy up their area requires them to observe and organise their space in their head first. Next, they need to come up with a plan to organise, hold this in their mind, and then follow through.

#### Storytelling

- » Storytelling can be used in a variety of ways to develop executive functioning skills. For example, when you tell a child a story, they need to pay attention, remember, identify the priority, and put the events into a sequence. You can develop these skills further, when children are ready, by asking them to retell the story to you.
- » Making up stories can get children to develop a structure and put events into a sequence.
- » Telling stories about their own experiences requires children to reflect on their experiences (which must be held in working memory) and explain the order or the way things happened (planning and sequencing). It can also be used as a prompt to explore feelings and behaviour. You can ask the child questions about why they or someone else felt the way they did or was there an alternative solution to the situation they described.

Name:..... Date:.....

Observing self-regulation	MORNING		EVENING		
	How (describe with few words the actual behaviour you observed)	Was it age-appropriate?	How (describe with few words the actual behaviour you observed)	Was it age-appropriate?	Ideas for development
Keeping attention/focus					
Changing attention					
Expressing feeling of discomfort					
Delayed gratification (e.g., not getting what they want immediately or having to wait)					
Expression of positive emotions					
Expression of negative emotions					
Empathizing with the feelings of other					
Meeting the rules, make others meet the rules					
Planning actions					
Organisation					
Choice, decision making					
Inhibiting behaviour					
Request for help					

TABLE 4. IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



**Games:**

- » Games with singing and movements like playing a song, which when stopped requires children to freeze (inhibition).
- » Rhymes, traditional games, dancing, circle-games, or skill games (e.g. target shooting, rope walking, etc.) can also be used to develop skills like sequencing, memory, organisation, and planning.
- » Card and board games provide important opportunities to make and hold a plan in mind.

- » Matching or sorting games require children to understand rules for organisation (e.g. grouping by shapes, colour, size, etc.), plan how they are going to do it and then follow that plan (holding their strategy in their mind while they do it). The use of puzzles also work well on the development of these skills.
- » You can work on developing memory by using memory games. For example, you could have a picture of three animals, a cow, a dog, and a cat. Show them to the child, then turn them over and ask the child to find the cat. As the child gets older you make the games more complex. You might have 10 cards, with 5 matching pairs, show them to the child and ask them to find all the pairs, and they can only turn over two cards at a time.
- » Some fast-moving games, such as fast-moving ball games, dodge ball or football. These types of games teach things like rule following, decision-making, cooperation/teamwork and self-control, as well as burning off any excess energy.

Working in pairs or small groups develops attention, monitoring their own actions and those of others, and adjusting their actions to achieve a goal.

**Test Yourself:**

- » Can you come up with an activity or game that you can use with your child that develops planning skills?
- » Can you come up with an activity or game that you can use with your child that develops memory skills?



**FIGURE 20.**  
**A CHILD PLAYING MEMORY-GAME**

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Understand emotional regulation
- » Understand how to support the development of emotional regulation of young children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and appropriately express emotions. It is also a key area where children with ADHD-like behaviours often struggle.

First of all, it is important to say that **there is nothing wrong with feeling an emotion**. Emotions are not good or bad. Emotions are not wrong or right. They just are. The problem with emotions is in **their expression**. For example, if a child gets overly excited and jumps on another child or if a child gets angry and hits another child, the other child may get hurt. We need to teach children **how to understand and manage their emotions** to ensure that their behavioural response to their emotions is appropriate. This section provides strategies to try and develop emotional regulation in early childhood in your home.

Accepting, naming, and exploring emotions:

The first step to being able to regulate your emotions is knowing you are experiencing an emotion and knowing what that emotion is. To begin with, create opportunities and spaces to teach your child about emotions and to talk to your child about their emotions.

**The proper vocabulary to name emotional states is important.** Parents / caregivers can teach these through stories (especially when emphasizing emotional words), they can teach children to associate emotions with particular facial expressions, and then children try to identify (on pictures) and then imitate these facial expressions. You can teach children **to name their own emotional experience using structured activities**. For example, when a child comes home at night or wakes up in the morning, a part of the routine can be to identify which emotion they associate with themselves and how they feel.

**Discussing emotions should be part of everyday life in your home.** Children should feel free to express emotions, so long as they do it appropriately, and should be rewarded when emotions are expressed appropriately. When your child is trying to explain how they feel, do not ignore or reject emotional experiences. You can support them being able to name their own emotions. For example, you might say, “Oh that sounds very upsetting” or “I can see why you feel angry” or “Wow that does sound very exciting”. When you help them name their own emotions it

**makes children feel accepted and understood** and it also enables them to be able to identify and name their own emotions in the future. For example, you might say, “I noticed you got frustrated when you were working on that puzzle” or you could say, “You look very worried”. After they start to be able to recognise it, you might ask, “how are you feeling?” and if they cannot tell you, then you can work with them to identify it.

Naming and exploring emotions can also become part of story time or the sharing or observing of experiences. For example, when reading Goldilocks and the three bears, you might ask the child what emotion Goldilocks felt when she woke up and saw the bears and you might ask them how they would feel if it happened to them. Exploring emotions should be done at every opportunity.

Managing Emotions:

A part of emotional regulation is

- » being able to manage how you feel and also
- » decide how to express your emotions (i.e. your own behavioural response).

Emotional expressions should be of **proper intensity** (not too low or too high). In order to control this, children need to monitor the intensity of their emotional experience and learn to manage their emotional experiences.

Monitoring emotional experiencing can be done using **the idea of a thermometer**, as long as your child understands this concept. This simple tool helps the child look at how they are feel-

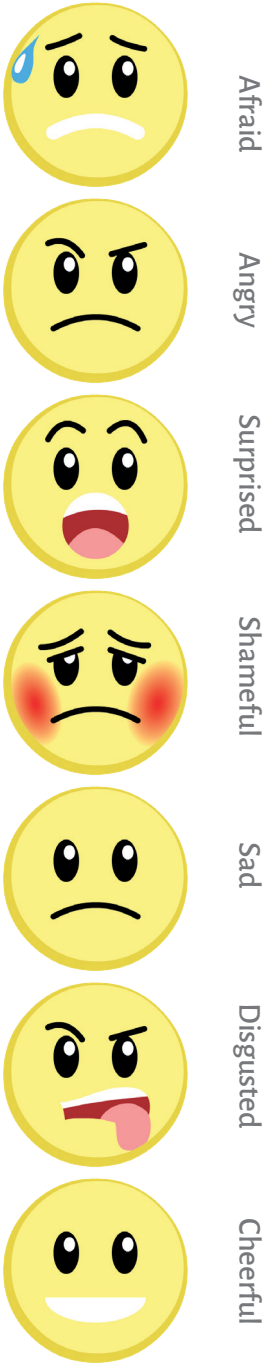


FIGURE 21. EMOTICONS DEPICTING VARIOUS EMOTIONS

ing, helps them self-regulate, and helps them recognize intense emotions in their body and mind. First, the child/children will need to know what a thermometer is. Once they understand this concept, you can explain how the weather changes with the seasons, and the thermometer monitors this. In a similar way, people all have emotional thermometers. Tuning in to how we feel or **where our emotional thermometer is** at is important. If our emotional thermometer is getting too high, then maybe we need to do something or change something to bring it back down. You can use a picture to represent the emotional thermometer (or get the child to draw it out). These can be used for one child or have a large one on a wall. This can be returned to as part of everyday structured activities (e.g. morning routine) or as events unfold across the day. An alternative way to express this idea might be through using a balloon (ranging from one which is deflated to one which is inflated to the point of bursting).

It is not advisable to use the emotional thermometer (or balloon) in a highly elevated state of emotion. **Wait for the child to feel calmer** and then can identify and discuss with the children what emotion and intensity led to the unacceptable behaviour.

To use the emotional thermometer properly, you need to **talk with your child in advance to illustrate each emotion** (we can use faces with emotional expressions, drawn faces, or emojis). Talk about the emotions involved in the pictures. What does that emotion mean? What happens before, what usually triggers the feeling? What facial expressions are associated with it? What do I look like and how do I feel when I feel that emotion?

Use the emotional thermometer according to the child's age. **In case of younger children work with just a few emotions.** If they are very young, just use a smiling face

and a sad face. With a bigger child, we can expand the range of emotions and introduce a "thermometer" for the intensity of emotions, which can also indicate the temperature of a particular emotion. (Burg, 2014; Muriel, 2018)

Some examples

» The Big Smiley emoticon: Expresses happiness. I'm very good, and I know that because I have a wide smile and laugh even.

- » Emoticon with a calm face: I'm quite fine. Everything is alright. My face is relaxed.
- » Sad face emoticon. I have very little energy, the edge of my mouth is narrowed, I am sad and cry.
- » Emoticon with an angry face: Something very annoying is happening right now. It is not a good feeling at all. I do not want to smile anymore, in fact, I rather make my teeth and narrow my eyes.

### Strategies to cope with emotions

(Hallowell & Ratey, 1994)

It is important that the parent teaches not only the recognition and naming of emotions, but also the coping strategies a child can use when experiencing a particular emotion. Play in the form of a role play how he/she behaves when he/she feels a particular emotion. Practice strategies when children are in a calm, balanced state. Come back to the topic of emotions more than once. Practice ingesting these behaviours so your child is more likely to execute them when he is angry or anxious.

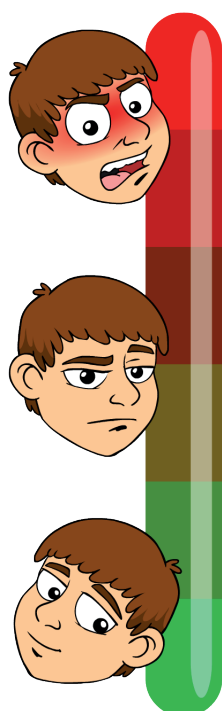
Once the child or children begin to be able to recognise and name their emotions, and when those emotions are becoming too strong/high, they will need strategies to be able to manage these emotions. It's worth making a **list of what NOT to do**: wrecking, swearing, fighting, etc. It is OK to be angry, it is not ok to destroy things.

A child can learn to manage intense emotional experiences by self-soothing or distracting themselves, or can ask for help from parents, older siblings, or other adults. Do not forget that, children need an adult to be able to regulate their emotions in an appropriate way. The ability to cope with stress or emotions is essential for everyday life, so we need to start practicing early.

**Self-soothing** is the process of soothing oneself. A mother may rock and sing to a baby to sooth them to sleep, but as children age, they increasingly need to be able to sooth themselves. Sometimes focusing on the emotion or the experience and trying to quieten it or relax it away does not work. **Distracting techniques** can be helpful too.

**Below are some techniques** you can teach your child, to support them in **managing their emotions**. As with all skills, they will need to find what works for them and practice them.

- » Breathing: Focusing on breathing can be very soothing. Teach the child to take deep breaths through the nose, hold for three second, and then breath out through their mouth. You can use a feather in the beginning to get the child to focus on breathing out through their mouth or tell them to image them blowing out a candle. This can sooth them on a physical and an emotional level as we focus on the body and relaxing its physical response to emotion. It's also a distraction to focus on breath rather than the emotion



**FIGURE 22.**  
**EMOTIONAL THERMOMETER TO SHOW THE INTENSITY OF A GIVEN EMOTION**



- » Visualisation: Try to get the child to think of a beautiful memory or their safe/happy place (e.g. bedroom at home, grandmothers garden, or the forest in Narnia). When they feel themselves getting upset, they need to recall that beautiful place. The more “real” they can make it, the better. When you are teaching them this strategy, start out by asking them what they see, what can they smell, are other people there, what colour are the walls, etc. The image needs to be clear and easily recalled, so that they can use it when they feel emotions intensely.
- » Get physical: Sometimes it's good to use the whole body. Let the child do gymnastics exercises to lower their energy and feel good by running, jumping, doing ten squats, wristbands, air boxing, or get down on the ground and squirm like a snake on their belly all the way along the corridor from the classroom door to the toilet and back again.
- » Have a “chill out corner” or “quiet corner” in your home (e.g., in the corner of the child's bedroom). Sometimes children can get overwhelmed by their environment and their emotions. It's helpful to have a space that is a safe quiet place to go and have some alone quiet time. You can portion it off from the rest of the room (e.g. a corner or a tent) where your child will want to go – a place that is cosy and comfortable. You can even use sensory toys or objects, which can help the child relax. Please do not use this space as the place they are sent when they have challenging behaviour. It should never be used as punishment. You want this space to be happy and desirable. If you use it for punishment, it will not help to self-sooth.
- » Pressing the pause button: You want the child to be able to recognise when they are getting upset, rather than reacting negatively. You want them to press the pause button to give them time to think and calm down before reacting. The pause button works best if the child has a backup strategy, that is, a plan for what they are going to do once they have pressed the pause button. It might be some of the things listed above or it could be that they are going to do something they enjoy, like sit in the reading corner or put their head on a desk for a few minutes.
- » When you see a child getting upset, you can divert their attention with tiny tricks. For example, you might point to the clock: “See how fast you can calm down so we can continue our day.”
- » Motivation: An important aspect of emotional management is the ability to use emotions and

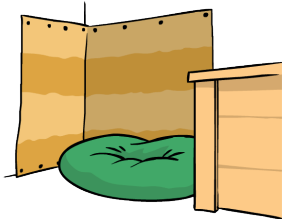
FIGURE 23. EXAMPLES FOR BEHAVIOUR ALTERNATIVES IN CRITICAL SITUATIONS



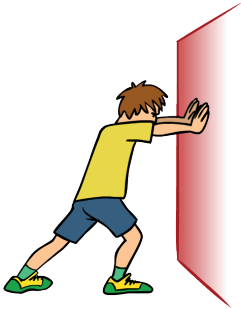
PLAY WITH PLASTICINE!



BREATHE DEEPLY!



FIND A CALM PLACE!



PUSH THE WALL!



PRESS A STRESS BALL!



LISTEN TO MUSIC!



thought to achieve a goal. For example, if you give a child a marshmallow and tell them if they don't eat it for 3 minutes you will give them 2 marshmallows. In order to achieve the goal (getting two marshmallows) the child needs to regulate their emotions and the behaviours (don't eat the one marshmallow). The child can use distraction techniques, like putting the marshmallow out of sight or focusing on other things (e.g. the bird outside the window) to help him/her achieve their goal. The child who can manage their emotions - to delay what they want immediately, in order to get a greater reward in the long run, is probably going to find life and work easier in the long run. In early childhood, by teaching children strategies (e.g. distraction techniques) and explaining the greater reward at the end, we can over time support them as they develop the ability to self-motivate.

Teaching problem-solving and alternatives for behaviour:

When a child behaves in a challenging manner, ask them an open-ended, empowering question to help them feel that they have choices.

Poor	Better
Why did you yell at him?	What led up to this situation?  Can you explain to me how that happened?
Why did you say / do that?	I'm not sure I understand.

TABLE 5. QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION

When you understand the behaviour a little more, **explore behavioural alternatives** with the child. For example, you might say, “I understand that when he wouldn't share the train with you, you became frustrated and so you grabbed the train from him. Is there anything you could have done differently?”. Explore alternatives and try and get the child to identify a better strategy. Plan with the child, what they will do next time. For example, they might try self-soothing or distracting (e.g. getting another toy to play with). **Don't expect the child to apply a new strategy after one conversation**, but the more you talk to him / her about it, the more likely that he/she will try it sooner or later.

You can use **games and role play** to name and develop awareness about emotions. You can also use games to get children to understand the effect their behaviour has on other people, like other children, sibling, parents/carers, and teachers. **Role play with the child what they will do** in situations where they feel frustrated or angry.

**Imaginary play** enables children to develop rules to guide their actions in playing roles. They also require “*holding of complex ideas in mind and shape their actions to follow these rules, inhibiting impulses, or actions that don't fit the 'role'.* (...) *While younger children tend to play alone or in parallel, children in kindergarten are learning to play cooperatively and often regulate each other's behaviour—an important step in developing self-regulation.*”

**Planning the play** can be a good way to organize play. “*Children decide who they are going to be and what they are going to do before they start playing, and then draw their plan on paper. Planning means that children think first and then act, thus practicing inhibitory control.*” Of course, the spontaneity and creativity of the game should remain, and the drawing is just an introduction to the play activity. “*Planning play in a group also encourages children to plan together, hold these plans in mind, and apply them during the activity. It encourages social problem solving, as well as verbal language development.*” (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014, 2015)

“*Recognise what motivates a child to perform at their best. Encourage the child rather than praise them: focus on celebrating the behaviour and effort, not just the result. Say things like, 'I've noticed that when things get difficult you just keep trying – that's fantastic'.*

*Model how to remain calm and in control when you are tired, angry or fed up. Say, 'I've had a tough day at work – can we talk about this later when I've had a chance to relax?'*” (Atkins, S. 2017)

Temper tantrums and sensory meltdowns

Children with ADHD-like behaviours can have outbursts of emotions. Before trying to modify the behaviours that may occur during these outbursts, we need to figure out what's triggering it, and what happens afterwards.

All behaviour (positive or negative) is the result of a child's emotional state. Children experience the same range of emotions that adults do, but often do not know how to verbalise or manage their feelings. As a result, observed behaviour may be challenging.

**If we perceive misbehaviour as intentional, a natural response may be to punish the behaviour. However, if we recognise that the child may be struggling with difficulties, we may be more encouraged to seek ways to provide support.**

There are two common types of outbursts: temper tantrums and sensory meltdowns. These two are not the

same, even though they appear very similar to each other. If you learn to recognise the differences between these outbursts, it can help you learn how to handle them.

### Temper Tantrum

This usually happens when children want to achieve something. In this type of outburst, the child expects us to react. When having a tantrum, a child is aware of the safety of himself and his environment and is also aware of his behaviour and can stop when he gets what he wants - or if he sees that he is not getting anywhere because we are not reacting to his behaviour.

#### What can the parent do in the case of a temper tantrum?

- » You can let the child know that you see what he/she is doing and you know what they want, but you will not give in to what they want. For example, you might say, "I understand you are angry that they will not give you that toy, even though you really want it. I see you want me to pay attention to you and when you have calmed down, we can talk about it".
- » **Talk about the situation:** Once the tantrum has subsided, talk to the child, let them know that it is OK to feel something (e.g. angry or hurt), but it is not OK to do XYZ (i.e. clearly describe the behaviour that was unacceptable).
- » Discuss with the child that the next time they find themselves in such a situation, what they can do differently, how they can express (without shouting) their anger in a different way.

### Sensory Meltdown

We usually think of children as having five senses – vision, touch, smell, taste and sound. But actually, there are two more that are important to be aware of – the sense of movement (vestibular function) and the sense of the position of our bodies in space (proprioception). **Not all children experience the same sensory input in the same way.** For example, for

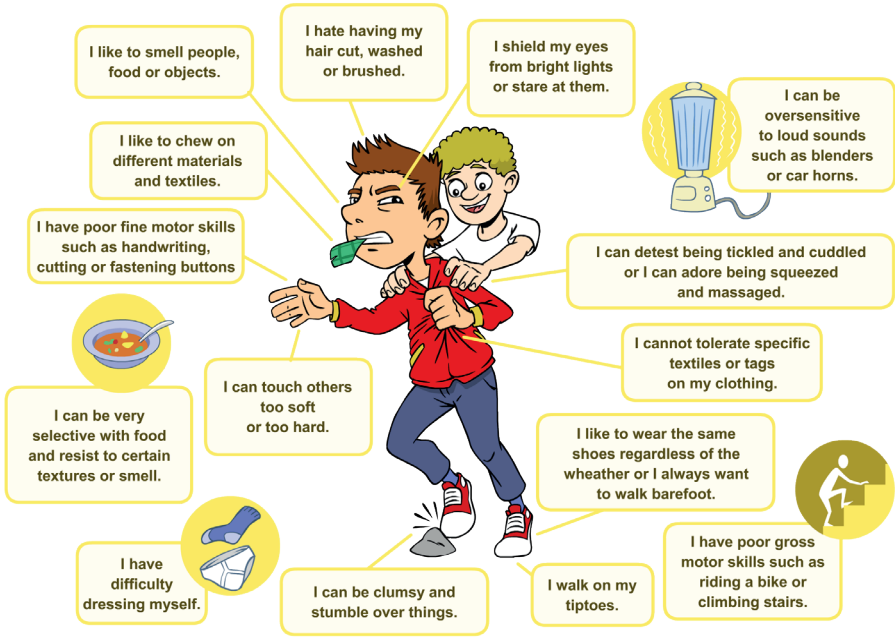


FIGURE 25. SITUATIONS THAT CARRY THE RISK OF SENSORY OVERLOAD

some children, the noise of a neon light might seem very loud and difficult to ignore, while other children may not even notice it. It's the same sensory input, but the way that the brain interprets the sensation can differ significantly between children.

Sensory meltdowns happen for children who may be struggling to interpret sensory information in an adaptive way. A sensory meltdown happens when **the child has received sensory input that their brain does not know how to interpret.**

In evolutionary terms, our brains are wired to protect us and ensure our survival – if our brain perceives a sensation that it doesn't know how to process, our brain automatically thinks that we are in danger and will respond either with a 'flight' response (run away) or a 'fight' response (attack). Once our brain learns that a sensation doesn't actually pose any danger, it will eventually ignore it (this is called "habituation").

Think of walking from your quiet car into a busy classroom with lots of noise and activity. At first, the noise sounds extreme and overwhelming and you might need a minute to get used to it.

A child runs up to you and starts speaking to you, and you can barely hear them over the noise – you have to pay extra attention to the child in order to drown out the background noise of the other children. At that point in time, ALL the new noise sensations are still being processed by

FIGURE 24. STRONG EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS CAN BE SCARY FOR THE OTHER CHILDREN, FOR THE TEACHER, BUT ALSO FOR THE CHILD PRODUCING THE BEHAVIOUR

your brain, which isn't yet sure whether the noise represents something to be wary of, and so you are essentially paying attention to every single sound that hits your ears.

Now think of the same classroom after you have been busy in it for a few hours. The same child runs up to you to speak and you seem to hear them much better. This is because your brain has identified that the various background noises are not actually a threat – **your brain has gotten used to them** (habituated to it) and so 'allows' you to stop paying any attention to what you don't need to be paying attention to. But if there is a sudden BANG of a dropped toy, you will quickly turn your attention back to the noise once again.

The brains of children who experience sensory difficulties often don't know how to effectively interpret sensory information in a way that allows them to pay attention to the sensations that they **need to pay attention to** and ignore the sensations that they **don't need to pay attention to**. This is an exhausting state to be in, and children who struggle to process sensory information effectively will often demonstrate emotional difficulties as well.

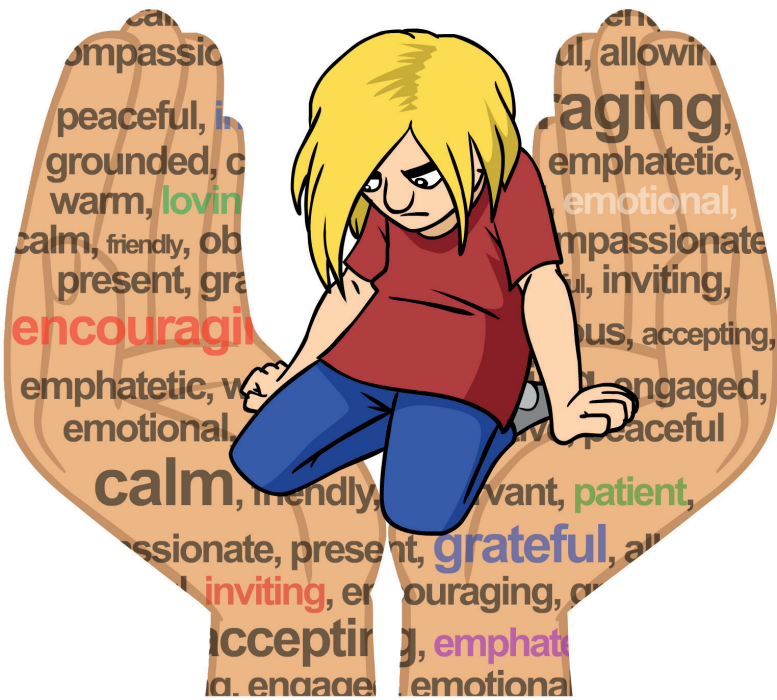
**Sensory meltdowns**

Sensory meltdowns are more extreme than tantrums. In this situation, the child completely loses control over his/her behaviour, and may lose his/her sense of danger. If we know what triggers a sensory meltdown (and we can spot the warning signs), then we can teach the child to also spot the signs, and by working together avoid the meltdown. If we can not stop the complete collapse, we will have to wait till it passes by. Meltdown can usually end in two ways:

- » tiredness: the children get exhausted in crying/yelling
- » the amount of sensory stimuli is reduced (e.g. the child is removed from the situation)

**What can parents do in case of sensory meltdown?**

- » Be prepared. If you know a child's specific sensory triggers, you can anticipate what may cause them difficulties and remove the child from the situation before they are overwhelmed
- » Each child is unique and sensory meltdowns are not the same for all children. Don't assume that one child's sensory preferences and aversions are the same for all children
- » Try to understand what's triggering a sensory meltdowns by observing patterns:



**FIGURE 26.**  
**WE HAVE TO HELP THE CHILD TO FIND THE STRATEGY THAT HELPS THEM TO COPE WITH OUTBURST**

What events triggers the meltdown? Sensory meltdowns may be exacerbated by hunger or tiredness. Try to notice what sensory events tend to happen before a sensory meltdown

- » Avoid problem situations. Do not force a child to face sensory experiences that they find challenging
- » Have a quiet space in the kindergarten, for example, you can offer the child noise cancelling headphones if this helps them to remain calm
- » Know the signs of escalation. If you detect warning signals in time, you can calm down the more sensitive children in time, before they have lost control
- » Be patient and calm and show empathy to the child

**During the meltdown**

- » Make sure everyone and everything is safe.
- » Meltdown may be scary for the parent, too. Try to stay calm.
- » Accompany the child to a more relaxed place. Provide him/her with a low-stimuli environment.
- » Plan what you are going to do after the meltdown, how to get him back to the group.



## After the meltdown

- » Leave time for the child to rest and recuperate. When the child begins to calm down, he/she may feel embarrassed or bad about the outburst. They are also going to be emotionally and physically exhausted. Give him/her time to gather their thoughts and get back to themselves again.
- » Find the right time to talk about what happened, and do so in a supportive manner. (Morin, 2018).

## Aggression

Another difficulty commonly associated with ADHD is aggression. This is often linked with difficulties regulating emotions. Aggression refers to any behaviour which **harms others** (e.g. hitting, calling other people names, biting, etc.). Obviously, aggression can be a problem for all children, regardless of whether they have ADHD or not. Aggression, especially if it is putting the child or others at risk, **cannot be accepted and cannot be tolerated** in school or at home. Sometimes aggression can be the result of an impulsive response to a situation, but it still cannot be accepted and requires management.

### Determine the problem.

Every time the child is physically aggressive, tell him that he has caused pain and should never hit others. Describe exactly what she/he was like when he lost control, what she/he was doing and what she/he could do differently. Instead of giving an order (e.g. “do not fight”), try to work together to figure out what's causing the behaviour and what she/he can do to change it.

Some questions you can ask the child are:

- » Can you tell me what led up to you hitting him?
- » What do you think about hitting him, do you think it was right?
- » How do you think it made him feel?
- » How would you feel?
- » Can you think of something else you could have done to help you deal with feeling angry? (e.g. talk to me / your granddad, express yourself with words, or just move away)
- » What are you going to do next time?

### Exercise typical or difficult situations in the form of role-play.

Role play gives the child the opportunity to experience other, more effective forms of behaviour, and this experience is like training a muscle. Exercising this skill will help the child to react properly in real life.

It is very important during the role play that the **negative role** (e.g. a child slipping into aggression) **is always played by the parent**. Role play should serve to demonstrate more of a positive example than replaying an

aggressive situation. Dolls can also be used to illustrate a negative situation, and then positive examples and ways of solving them will be presented based on the suggestions of the children.

### Don't be afraid to ask for help!

If the child often has aggressive outbursts and meltdowns, which cannot be helped by using the strategies in this manual, then do not wait until it becomes completely unmanageable, ask for help from a specialist.

## Test yourself:

- » What is emotional regulation?
- » Can you identify two ways that you can support children naming and understanding their own emotions?
- » What is the emotional thermometer and why is it helpful?
- » Can you identify two strategies to support children managing their emotions?
- » What's the difference between tantrums and meltdowns?
- » Can you identify two things you will do differently when trying to change aggressive behaviour?



## 3e Behaviour modification

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will:

- » Be familiar with the Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) Model for supporting children with ADHD-like behaviours
- » Understand strategies of positive behaviour support for children with ADHD-like behaviours

Behaviour modification techniques aim to develop, strengthen, maintain, reduce, or modify behaviours. These include:

- » Supporting the development of new behaviours (these are the behaviours a child has not yet begun to develop)
- » Strengthen existing behaviours (these are behaviours a child has begun to develop, but needs further support to achieve e.g. a child has begun to attempt to wash their hands, but they still need to learn all the steps and dry afterwards).
- » Maintaining established behaviours (these are behaviours that the child has mastered, which you wish to reinforce e.g. a child has learnt to organise their materials, and you wish them to continue to do so)
- » Modifying a particular behaviour (these are behaviours that need some refining - e.g. it is okay for a child to express anger, but they should not do this by screaming)
- » Reducing challenging behaviour

Behaviour modification techniques are based on the idea that when a child behaves in a certain way they are **doing it for a reason**. Before trying to change a behaviour, the parent / caregiver needs to try and understand what the “function” of the behaviour is. Once the function of a behaviour is understood, teachers can use different techniques to change or shape the behaviour.

**The ABC model** says that all behaviours (including challenging behaviours) serve a „function“. The behaviour has a purpose, the child uses the behaviour as a way to get things they want: to escape / avoid something unpleasant; to get attention; to get access to items or materials; and/or for self-stimulation / sensory reasons.

The Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) Model depends on the ability to observe the child's behaviour in context, looking at what led up to a behaviour (antecedents), observing the behaviour itself, and what comes after the behaviour (consequences). Once we understand the behaviour, we can then work towards changing it.

### A-B-C Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence

- » Antecedents (triggers) happen BEFORE the challenging behaviour
- » Behaviour: this is the specific behaviour (e.g. a challenging behaviour) – this is what your focus is, this is what you want to modify/change
- » Consequences: happen AFTER the behaviour

#### Step 1) Identify the Behaviour.

- » Select one behaviour that you want to change or modify.
- » Make sure that the selected behaviour is something you can see and measure. For example, the child gets up from circle time and wanders around the classroom is something you can see, and you can measure (e.g. you can count how many times the child does this over the course of 10 minutes).
- » Do not pick a behaviour that you cannot easily describe and measure, for example, “a bad attitude” or “being moody” are hard to measure.
- » Decide when and where you are going to measure it. For example, if it is infrequent, then you may want to take note every time the behaviour happens. However, if it happens a lot, then decide to measure for specific periods (e.g. 20 minutes three times a day for 1 week).

#### Step 2) Observation

Using the ABC model depends on the quality of your observation. So, take time to plan and do the observation. You could ask for help from others in your home (e.g., older siblings, grandparent).

**Schedule:** Decide when you will observe the behaviour. This will depend on the challenging behaviours you are aiming to observe. You might select a specific time of the day (e.g., while playing or during dinner time), which you space out over the course of a few weeks. You might choose to observe when a child presents with a specific behaviour – each time the child acts a certain way over a few days or a few weeks.

**Record:** Use a table and record the behaviours you see. The more details about the behaviour you have, the better placed you will be to analyse the behaviour and understand it's function.

**Objectivity:** Your “observation” needs to be objective. This means that we need to record only what we actually see. Try to record without interpretation, judgement or jumping to conclusions. In the beginning, just write down what

you see in terms of the behaviour and write down what was going on before and after the challenging behaviour occurred.

**Note the Antecedents (triggers)**

- » These are the events that occurred before the behaviour, leading up to it or triggering it.
- » These events include things in the environment (e.g. noise, sound, light, social demands like having to share with other children, needing to tidy up, or having to sit still).

**Note the Consequences**

- » These are the things that happen after the behaviour.
- » A child's behaviour (wanted or unwanted) is often increased or maintained by the consequence.

ANTECEDENT	BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
What happens directly before that “triggers” the behaviour	What the person does (defined in measurable, observable terms)	What happens directly after the behaviour, from student's perspective. What does the student GET or AVOID?

TABLE 6. THE ABC MODEL

**Examples**

ANTECEDENT	BEHAVIOUR	CONSEQUENCE
Teacher hands out a math worksheet with word problems	Student says he won't do the work and calls the teacher a name	Teacher sends student out to buddy classroom (AVOID Math worksheet/classroom activities)
Peers refuse to let the student join their game	Student cries and yells	Teacher comes over, problem solves a solution (GET adult attention in the form of help)

TABLE 7. EXAMPLES FOR THE ABC MODEL

**Step 3) Analyse the Behaviour:**

After you observe, move on to your analysis, and start to look for patterns in behaviour (what's similar) or if something is **different** why was it different in that situation.

*Let's look at an example of the A-B-C model.*

First, select a behaviour to observe and record over the course of a week. This should be an area that you think is an area in need of development for the child, e.g. “does not tidy away toys”.

Date / time	Antecedents	Challenging behaviour	Consequence
Monday morning	Child shows signs of losing interest in what they are playing with	Child leaves toys on floor	Goes to the shelf and takes another item and begins to play with it
Tuesday lunchtime	Parent explains to the children that they can go out and play once they have cleared away their toys	Child dumps toys on the shelf and goes outside to play	Parent notices the toys have not be placed carefully on the shelf. Goes outside and makes the child sit on a step
Wednesday lunchtime	Parent explains to the children that they can go out and play once they have cleared away their toys	Child dumps toy on the shelf and goes outside to play	Parent notices the toys have not be placed carefully on the shelf. Goes outside to find the child, and tells him to go back inside. Child starts shouting in protest and the child is sent to their room for the evening
Thursday morning	The parent reminds children that they will not be able to go to watch TV unless their area is clean	At dinnertime, the child leaves the toys beside the shelf and goes to the dinner table	The parent tells the child they cannot come to dinner until their toys are tidied away and begins dinner with the rest of the family. The child gets upset and starts to shout and refuses to leave the table.

TABLE 8. OBSERVING THE CHILD WITH THE HELP OF THE ABC MODEL

Analysing the behaviour in the above example:

- » The child did not attempt the task
- » The child was reminded immediately beforehand (this could be due to memory or planning difficulties)
- » The child may not understand what is involved in the instructions (tidy away your toys)
- » The child may have planning difficulties and so may not know how to do the steps of tidying up

Step 4) Create a Strategy

Once you have a better understanding of some of the behaviours and their functions, you can develop strategies to modify the behaviour. The behaviour modification techniques can be applied to the antecedent and/or the consequences based on an understanding of the function of the behaviour is the behaviour trying to achieve (e.g. get attention, avoid an activity that the child does not understand or know how to do).

ANALYSIS	STRATEGY
You might start to notice that the child will behave in certain ways, such as ignoring their parent or wanting to go outside (challenging behaviour) whenever they are asked to sit quietly at dinner or to focus on a particular task independently. You might see a link between these tasks and think that the child struggles to sit quietly for long periods (environmental demand as an antecedent).	<p>Adapt antecedent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Break down the time the child is required to sit still for (if they struggle to do 10 minutes, then do 5 minutes).</li><li>» Provide an egg timer so that child knows how long they need to remain at their task.</li></ul> <p>Adapt consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Reward the child as they work towards achieving their goal. Be consistent in consequences if they do not achieve their agreed goal</li></ul>
You might start to notice certain behaviours that may be linked to certain emotions (emotional state as an antecedent) for example, becoming excitable after they come home for kindergarten.	<p>Adapt the antecedents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Create a calm structured environment:</li><li>» <b>Provide a routine for coming home from kindergarten. Use visual aids or prompts to remind the child about the steps of the routine</b></li><li>» <b>Reduce the amount of information, stimulation (e.g., noise), and excitement</b></li><li>» Teach the child to use calming techniques and give them a prompt to remember to use them when needed.</li></ul>
Child struggles to tidy away their materials after an activity (behaviour) because they do not understand or remember how to organise these materials ways (antecedents).	<p>Adapt antecedents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Provide a visual aid to remind them of what they need to do and the steps involved.</li></ul> <p>Adapt consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Begin by rewarding them if they complete some steps and as the behaviour strengthens, provide rewards when the entire task is complete.</li></ul>
A child starts shouting (behaviour) when another child wants to play with them and their toys (antecedent). As a result, the other child leaves them alone, which makes the child feel better in the moment (immediate positive outcome for the child). However, the consequences are challenging behaviour for parent and other children and potential social implications for the child.	<p>Adapt antecedents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Teach the child about sharing and start activities with them and another child.</li></ul> <p>Adapt consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Reward them when the share and play with other children.</li></ul>

TABLE 9. CREATING A STRATEGY BASED ON THE ABC MODEL

Start Small and Go Slow:

Select 1-3 specific behaviours you want to modify. Begin with one behaviour and complete your ABC observations and then your analysis.

Focus on Positive Outcomes:

Identify the behaviour you want to change (the challenging behaviour) and define it as something positive or desired. In the example used above, the challenging behaviour was “child does not tidy away toys”, the positive behaviour or desired behaviour “is able to tidy away toys independently”. Remember, this is about developing behaviour.

Achievable:

Make sure that the desired behaviour is something that the child can do (with support). Over time, you can make the behaviour more complex, but start out with something specific and something which is a slight improvement on current behaviour. Once they have achieved this, you can increase the complexity of what you want – this is called shaping behaviour.

Focus on rewards:

Rewards teach children what they should do (rather than what they should not do). Children with ADHD-like behaviour may not respond to punishment (McBurnett et al., 2008). The aim of the ABC model is to develop the desired behaviour.

Positive reinforcement is one of the most effective behaviour modification tools. It can be done in several ways. Work out what rewards worked before for the individual child, and what motivates them (Barkley, 2013).

- » Verbal praise: We've mentioned before that praise is most effective for children with ADHD-like behaviour when it's immediate (due to impulsivity and forgetfulness). All children benefit from praise when it is specific and communicates to the child the desired behaviours we want to develop. So, praise the effort, rather than the child (Dweck et al., 2014). For example, if a child finishes their dinner and tidies their dishes away, and we say, “you're such a good girl,” we may inadvertently be giving the message that – if they forget the following day – they are a “bad girl”. It's much more helpful to say something like, “I noticed that you were able to sit still for a long time today at dinner, even I know this is sometimes hard for you. You also cleaned up after yourself so well, well done.”



FIGURE 27. EXAMPLE OF A REWARD CHART

- » Non-verbal reward: We don't always have to use our words – sometimes a touch on the shoulder, an encouraging look, a thumbs up, something positive or playful. In this way, we let the child know we notice them and they are important.
- » Tangible reward (stars, stickers, smileys): A tangible reward is something the child can see and hold. Teachers can develop a rewards system for the child or the class. For example, every time you see the child being kind or sharing with another child, they might get a smiley face sticker on the wall or in a copy book. They can keep this in the locker or take home to show their parents – you could even develop a system that works both at home and in school. Once the child has a certain number of smiley faces, they might get something they want, like time doing something they love (e.g. painting).

Rewards need to be:

- » Appealing: The same rewards will not work with the same level of intensity over time. They will need to be changed, to keep the child interested.
- » Immediate: When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours the reward needs to be immediate, so make sure you reward directly after the positive behaviour.

Catch the child being good! (Massachusetts Medical Society, 2000.)

Reward Charts:

You can try to develop a reward system. When the child meets expectations or demonstrates the desired behaviour, they get a token (e.g., sticker, star, check). When



the child reaches a certain number of tokens, then he/she can have a reward (e.g., time at an activity he/she loves). Get creative: You can create a reward chart with the child. (Barkley, 2013)

### **Consequences:**

It is best to focus on rewards. But, if you want to use consequences try to avoid punishment, ignore challenging behaviour, and use logical or natural consequences.

### **Avoid punishment:**

Try to avoid using punishment. A child learns very little from punishment and it may not be effective for children with ADHD-like behaviour.

Punishment is anything negative (e.g., telling a child not to do something, a negative consequence like having to sit in timeout, or a cross look).

Avoid shaming the child for their behaviour.

### **Ignoring challenging behaviours**

Try ignoring challenging behaviours. Often children use challenging behaviour to get something they want (e.g. attention), so ignoring the behaviour may prevent reinforcing it.

### **Logical or natural consequences:**

If you are going to use consequences of a negative nature, then try using logical consequences or natural consequences.

**Logical consequences** are responses to challenging behaviour that seek to be respectful of the child, teach them something, and do not cause any shame or embarrassment. An example of a logical consequence is making up for what was done (e.g., Sam shouts at Sara, and so Sam needs to say sorry to Sara and listen Sara tell him how it made her feel) or a loss of privilege.

**Natural consequences** are things that happen naturally without parent interference. For example, Tara refuses to eat her dinner and so is hungry in the afternoon.

Where possible, consequences should be discussed and agreed with the child beforehand, that way, the child understands them and knows it's about a specific behaviour and not about them. They are still a good and loved child, but their behaviour may be unacceptable.

### **Children's voice – Include the Child in Understanding the behaviour and developing a strategy:**

Make sure you include the child in the process of using the ABC model. Practice is most effective when children are involved in analysing and co-creating a strategy (and selecting the best type of reward).

The aim is not just to reduce challenging behaviour but rather to develop the child's own skills (e.g. behaviour control, knowledge of self, awareness). By involving them into the process, we talk with them about this, we support this development.

Make sure the child is aware of the positive behaviour. You can make positive behaviour cards (visual reminders) about the desired behaviour. Make sure the child knows what behaviour is desired (behaviour) and what reward (consequence) they will receive when they do it.

Explain sequences: Executive functions mean that children with ADHD-like behaviours can have difficulties with sequences, so some children do not always make the connection between their behaviour and the consequence. For example, they may be confused if another child doesn't want to play with them after they shouted at them. You can explain or use visual tools here (e.g. comic strips) to explain the sequence of events, in terms of getting them to understand their challenging behaviour and to support the development of positive behaviours.

At the early stages of shaping new behaviours, children might need a lot of reminders and feedback. If we think the child is starting to show a challenging behaviour, we can say, "I see you are getting frustrated, remember if you share with your friends, then you will get a sticker on your chart". This can be a reminder to adapt the antecedent and achieve the desired behaviour.

Be adaptable:

You may need to repeat the ABC model. Sometimes our analysis (or our interpretation) isn't always correct and/or children's needs will change over time. You may need to redo the ABC and come up with a new strategy.

**Do not always expect immediate results, the key to modify behavioural strategies is time and persistence.**

## **Test Yourself**

- » What does ABC stand for?
- » Why should you involve the child in the ABC model?
- » Can you identify and explain three different ways to reward behaviour?
- » What should we be mindful of when verbally praising children?
- » What are logical consequences?

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## Unit 4. Working with your child, your child's school, and other professionals

*"It takes a whole village to raise a child"*  
(African proverb)

### Learning outcomes:

By the end of this section you will:

- » Understand the impact of receiving a diagnosis and how to cope with receiving a diagnosis
- » Identify the advantages and disadvantages of telling your child about a diagnosis
- » Consider how to talk to your child about ADHD, their experiences, the challenges they face, and strategies they may adopt
- » Identify how to work together with your child's kindergarten to better support your child's needs

Understanding and supporting a child with challenging and ADHD-like behaviour requires the cooperation of teachers, school staff, parents /carers, and community services and supports. This unit explores working in partnership with other key stakeholders (i.e. your child, teachers, professionals, and the community) involved in supporting your child.

## 4a If your child has received a diagnosis of ADHD

For parents/carers, receiving the news that your child has been diagnosed with any condition can be a difficult time. Some parents may have suspected their child had different needs from other children, so, sometimes, a diagnosis can come as a relief. For others, this can be a difficult time, and they may struggle to process the news and accept the diagnosis. The process of accepting a diagnosis, however, is essential in order to support the child. So, **to begin to support the child we must first support ourselves**. It's important for parents to give themselves the time and space needed to process the news.

**1. Take care of yourself first:** Be compassionate and understanding of you. Take your time and create space to take care of yourself (e.g., take baths, go for walks, meet friends for tea, meditate, etc.). If you are in a good place yourself, you will be better able to support your child.

**2. Get support:** Create a support network. This might be friends, family, or people in your child's school (e.g., teachers). You can also find support from ADHD organisations and support groups, where you will meet other people like yourself.

**3. Acceptance:** Children with special needs tend to do better when their parents / carers accept their needs and areas for development. Acceptance is not a one-off event, but is part of an adaptation process that involves knowing and accepting of our own feelings, the emotional processing of the situation, and the need to overcome difficulties. Sometimes parents / carers can be relieved when they receive a diagnosis, because it provides answers to things they have wondered about, as well as access to resources and supports. For others, diagnosis can be difficult and they may even feel a sense of grief, or feelings of shame, sadness, self-blame, anger, and fear; these feelings are natural and common. But, we need to try and avoid letting these negative emotions impact on the decisions we make as parents.

**4. Avoid the blame game:** ADHD often comes along with feelings of blame. For example, parents might blame themselves or they might blame the school or society. Parents may feel like people in the community blame them and they may feel like they are bad parents or like people think they are bad parents. People in the community might blame the child. For yourself and for your child, try to avoid getting into the trap of trying to find someone to blame. Try to focus more on finding a solution and who can bring a part of that solution.

**5. Educate yourself:** Knowledge is power! A big part of accepting a diagnosis and parenting a child with challenging or ADHD-like behaviours is to understand and then accept what is going on. An essential part to supporting your child is to know what they find challenging and what works in terms of supporting them. Parents of children

with ADHD often need to advocate for their child. This may involve teaching other people about ADHD and about what your child needs to be successful. So, you will need to educate yourself in order to do this.

You can get knowledge and skills from a variety of places:

- » Professionals and specialists who diagnosis and/or treat ADHD
- » Other parents of children with ADHD
- » Teachers
- » ADHD organisations
- » Parent training
- » Libraries
- » Online (e.g., ADHD websites, blogs, articles, etc.).

Parenting groups or parent support groups, especially when it is specially for parents of children with ADHD, can be a huge help. Parents can not only get emotional support but also practical support too. Parents can share knowledge and understanding about what has worked for their child. Parent training—if there is one within reach—can also be very helpful, where you attend a course and learn practical strategies to support your child at home.

**6. Stay positive:** Try to see and value your child's strengths, actively seeking these and making use of them.

### Test yourself:

- » What do you need to do first before you can support your child?
- » Why is important to avoid playing the blame game?
- » In which ways can a parenting group help?

## 4b Working with Children

### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this section, you will

- » Be able to adopt effective strategies for communicating with children with ADHD
- » Consider the importance of children's voice for their own self-advocacy

### Communication with the Child

As emphasised throughout this manual, children with ADHD process information differently from typically developing children. As a result, communicating with children with ADHD can sometimes be a challenge. Below are some suggested strategies for communicating with children with ADHD-like behaviours to get and keep their attention, be really clear (think of executive function difficulties), and support motivation and management of emotions.

#### Getting and keeping attention:

Try to do the following to get and keep the child's attention:

- » When you want the child's attention, call them by their name
- » Make sure the child is listening - you might wish to touch their arm to get their attention
- » Don't assume that eye contact means attention; a child may be listening to you even if they are not looking at you
- » Permit fidgeting, many children with ADHD-like behaviour find it easier to listen if they are fidgeting. Consider giving them a squeeze ball, a rubber, or a toy
- » Children with ADHD-like behaviour often find it easier to communicate in one-to-one situations
- » Use physical space well: communication is better when you are close to the child. When you are not, come up with a verbal signal to use. Get down on the child's level, so get on your knees or sit on a chair so that you can look them in the eye

- » Keep it simple
- » Keep it short

#### Communicate clearly and provide structure:

Children with ADHD-like behaviours might struggle with complex instructions, or they may quickly forget what was said.

- » Be clear: If you are giving instructions, then tell them clearly with obvious, concrete instructions. Avoid complex directions or requests. Use simple words and simple sentences.
- » Break it down for them: When giving directions or explaining something break into small steps. Once they have done one step, you can then ask another small manageable task.
- » Don't ask, tell. Be clear - are you making a request or are you giving instructions.
- » Use repetition effectively
- » Use communication aids: For children with ADHD-like behaviours it can be helpful to have communication aids to help with memory, sequencing, etc. This may be achieved with a story board showing sequence of steps, images of what is expected of them, or non-verbal gestures that only you and the child understand
- » Be predictable: use the same instruction in often occurring, similar situations, phrasing the same way, with minimal choices
- » Check for understanding: When you have spoken with a child, make sure they have heard and understood.

### Motivation and Emotion

Use communication effectively to encourage motivation to start and complete a task. Be careful to avoid emotionally triggering communication styles (Myers, 2014).

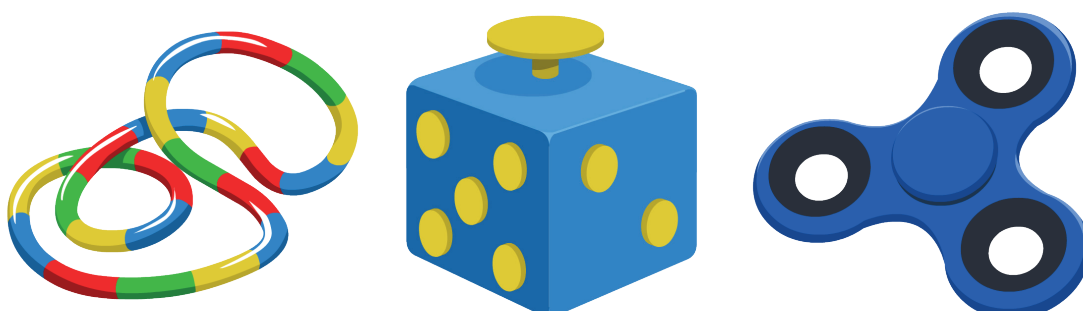


FIGURE 28.  
FIDGETS



- » Watch your tone: Children with ADHD-like behaviour can be sensitive to tone. Communicate in a soft, calm, gentle, but firm tone
- » Follow the child's preferred communication style: Depending on the child, you may want to speak in a whisper (to get their attention focused) or to speak a little more quickly
- » Give choices: within the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, provide the child with choices and respect them
- » Using fun, play, and competition: You can try and get them motivated by making things into a fun or competitive game

### Children's Voice: working "with" children

The idea of children's voice is about valuing and respecting children's rights and abilities to have their views heard and listened to.

This approach sees children as experts in their experiences, their behaviour, and what works and doesn't work in how we support them at home or in the community. So, adults try to work "with" children to gather information about their behaviour and their experiences, that leads to better strategies and supports, children who feel more empowered, and the development of skills within the child (e.g., communication, self-awareness, and self-advocacy). It's important that you don't only listen to what the child says, you need to respond to this and let them know you have listened to them.

### Accessing voice

When children are young and/or have difficulties communicating, you might need to adapt how you work with them and gather information. Creative and visual (image-based) activities can be a helpful way to explore issues and gather information from young children with ADHD-like behaviours

- » Drawing and other art-based techniques, such as draw-and-tell (e.g., get the child to draw a picture about a specific situation and explain it to you)
- » Photo voice (e.g., get a child to take photos of their experience and explain why they took it)
- » Maps of their home, community, bedroom, etc. (created with / by the child or images you create to support discussion)
- » You can find images (e.g., pictures you create, in books, photos) and talk to the child about it.
- » Using other methods of the artist's practice (e.g., story telling, clay, dance).

Try to tap into the child's preferences around communication. For example, if the child loves to move, creating a dance might be a useful tool.

Remember the principles of good communication discussed above, in terms of keeping it simple and structured to support difficulties children have with attention or processing information.



**FIGURE 29. THE MAP OF THE CHILD'S ROOM WITH THE EYE OF A CHILD**

### Collaborative Problem Solving:

Drawing on Greene's (2010) collaborative problem-solving (CPS) approach, when collaborating with children, you can use his three step approach which he designed for use with children.

Before you meet with the child, identify the lagging skills and/or unsolved problem. By definition, CPS is "collaborative" and so based on communication between student-teacher.

### Step Process:

- » Empathy: Parent / carer gathers information in order to clarify the child's concern or perspective on the unsolved problem. The parent / carer should reassure the child that trying to solve the problem is not just up to the parent, it needs to be done by working together.
- » Define the Problem: The parent communicates their concerns or perspective on the unsolved problem.
- » The Invitation: the parent and the child brainstorm solutions to address the unsolved problem (these are your strategies).

## 4c Working with your child's kindergarten

### Parent-kindergarten collaboration

A strong positive relationship between parents/carers and teachers is essential for all children, but it is especially important when it comes to children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours. The skills discussed in previous units are learned **most effectively when home and school work together**. This ensures consistency of messages for the young child.

Children spend a lot of time in their kindergarten and the nature of the child's relationship with their kindergarten teacher can have long-lasting impacts. You can support the development of a positive relationship by fostering your own positive relationship with staff.

Openness is key here – if you have information about your child (e.g., you've noticed challenges at home or your child has a diagnosis) it may be in the child's interest to share the information with the child's teacher. Honest and timely sharing of information may mean earlier access to the correct types of supports. Openness is also important because it builds trust between you and your child's teacher.

There are many reasons why a parent might not want to share some types of information with their child's teacher. However, it is important to be aware of the risks of not sharing information (László, 1997):

- » Without all the information, the kindergarten teacher might make mistakes in their assessment
- » The teacher might give parents unnecessary or unwanted educational or parenting advice
- » Parents may feel like they only get reports of problems about their child, because the teacher thinks the parent is unaware
- » The child gets less support and the support is not consistent between home and school
- » The relationship between parent-teacher is strained and stressful
- » Rather than seeing a child that is struggling, a lack of communication may mean your child's behaviour is stigmatized
- » It takes a lot longer for the teacher to get to know the child. As a result, the child's needs are not supported for a delayed period, which wastes valuable time during a critical period of the child's development

On the other hand, if parents share concerns, experiences and observations about their child with the teacher, there may be many positives:

- » The teacher gets to know the child more quickly, which speeds up the process of acceptance, understanding, and compassion
- » The teacher is better equipped to develop and use individualised strategies
- » The teacher may be more empathetic
- » Negative labelling may be prevented
- » The kindergarten can prepare the classroom to better support your child (pedagogical assistant, thoughtful work plan, structured visual environment, etc.)
- » Parents feel more understood, better supported, and less worried about their child
- » You can also share information about your child's strengths

**How can you cooperate best with the teacher?**  
(Zeigler et al., n.d.)

Parents are experts in their child. So, **share your expertise with the teacher**. What information should you give the teacher about your child:

- » Strengths and positive characteristics
- » Interests and talents
- » Be honest about challenging behaviours
- » Strategies that have been tried and work for the child at home
- » Any other important health issues
- » Relevant family information – if there are any changes or challenges within the family (e.g., moving house, birth of a sibling, death, divorce, illness) make sure to let the teacher know, because they can impact how the child feels and behaves

**Ask for advice.** Kindergarten teachers are extremely knowledgeable about childhood development and education, are informed about ADHD services and parenting strategies. They may have some good ideas about what could support your child at home.

**Be a team.** Work together with your child's teacher to explore problems and find solutions. Explain to the teacher what you are focusing on at home or any challenges you are currently facing and explore ideas or options with the teacher. Be proactive, search the opportunities for cooperation.

**Be proactive.** In the kindergarten, be part of the parent-teacher association, volunteer in the group, go with

the group on school trips, and go to kindergarten events. These occasions don't only give you a chance to observe your child in a group of children their age, they also help you to develop positive relationships with teachers, school staff, and other parents.

**Be positive.** Do not only talk about the problems with the teacher. Make sure you talk about the child's strengths, but also what is going well at home, the child's achievements, and what the child loves about the teacher and about school. If the teacher does something you appreciate, then take the time to thank them.

**Respect the teacher's time, which is limited.** It's good to be aware of this, because they might not be able to meet as regularly as we want. Make sure you talk with your child's teacher and try and figure out what the best type of communication is and how often you will catch up.

Communication strategies

Think about "how" we talk to teachers. Some forms of communication can be helpful, they make people feel heard, understood, and accepted (Mendoza et al, 2003). When you are talking to teachers, a few things to think about:

Avoid blame, criticism, and anger:

When talking about the child, make sure that the focus is on exploring the situation with the aim of better understanding current challenges.

- » Be factual;
- » Avoid words that are emotionally charged;
- » Avoid blame, criticism, and anger (Wheeler, 2010).

I-messages:

Make use of 'I-messages' especially when talking about your feeling.

To lessen any potential feelings of upset, you can speak to a teacher in the first person and focus on your experiences / thoughts / feelings. None can be angry with you for how you feel or your perceptions, as long as they are not accusations. So, begin by describing the situation and why it is a problem. Be careful, do not accuse them of anything, you don't want them to try and defend themselves.

- » For example, if the child is upset when he/she comes home from school, because they feel like the other children are being mean to them.
- » This could be communicated to the teacher in an accusatory way, for example, a parent could say, "Corina came home again very upset, the children are always being mean to her and none seems to be doing anything about it". This is accusatory and over-general. Make sure you are specific and focus on one or a few specific situations. Be careful here, do not use words like 'always' or 'never'. For

example, do not say, 'he/she never listens to me' or 'he/she is always knocking things over'. It's not about other behaviours and these words usually don't work, they make people want to defend themselves. Avoid making generalisations.

- » This could be communicated using I-messages and in a collaborative way. For example, a parent could say, "I am very worried about my daughter. Corina came home from school yesterday very upset. I think she is having a hard time on the playground getting along with other children. Have you noticed anything? Is there anything we can do to support her?" This way, you are leaving the possibility open that you or the child are at least partly responsible for the situation. By extension, you need to work together with your child and teacher to find a solution.

Trust is key:

You need to trust the teacher and the teacher needs to trust you. Make sure the teacher knows you trust them and that they can trust you. A good way to build trust to being open, honest, and trying to understand the teacher's views (so be patient and understanding).

Feedback Sandwich

Talk about 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Development'. **Even when talking about problems or concerns, start and finish the conversation with a positive remark.**

<b>Bread</b> (positive feed-back)	Pete loves your class so much. He is always talking about the nature walks you take home on and how much he loves listening to you tell them about the animals in the forest.
<b>Filling</b> (something you want to change or to work on)	At the moment, we are really trying to work on developing Pete's organisation skills. I think because he is so curious, he will often get up and get a new toy off the shelf without tidying away the toys he was playing with. I know what doesn't work with Pete is when people raise their voice at him. He completely shuts down or lashes out when he gets overwhelmed. I wonder if you could ask the staff not to raise their voices?
<b>Bread</b> (positive feed-back)	I am just so happy that Pete has you as a teacher this year. I can really see how much he loves coming to school in the morning. I think it's the calmness of your classroom, it really helps him.

TABLE 10. THE FEEDBACK SANDWICH METHOD



This positive tone helps even teacher who might feel defensive, to feel that they are valued and respected as a teacher and to see their relationship with your child in a positive light. Whenever you are talking about something you think could be changed in the school, try and focus on why it's a challenge for your child. Do not make it 'bad' or 'wrong' for all children. Just make it about a specific difficulty that your child has and how if it was changed it would make life easier for him / her.

### **Collaboration – be a team:**

Working with teachers is all about working together. It's important to discuss and celebrate success and achievement just as much as (if not more than) challenges and areas for development. As the parent, you need to stress the importance of working together as a team in support of the child.

- » Use lots of “we” language. For example, you might say things like, 'what are we going to do?', 'how do you think we are getting on?', 'we really need to think about this one', or 'this is going really well, we are doing great!'

- » Focus on what can be done if you work together. Let parents know you are there for them if they need help or support. Suggest dates for follow-up and recommend others who can also support or be part of the child's team of champions (e.g. parent groups to discuss the situation).

### **Test yourself:**

- » Why is it important to work with your child's teacher?
- » What risks are there if you do not share all relevant information with your child's teacher?
- » What are the benefits of working collaboratively with your child's teacher?

## **4d Working with other professionals and the community**

### **Learning Outcomes:**

**By the end of this section, you will:**

- » Know how to advocate for reducing stigma associated with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours
- » Be able to advocate for early identification and support for children with challenging and ADHD-like behaviours with:
  - » Health-care professionals
  - » Education professionals
  - » Social care professionals
  - » Other people affected by ADHD-type behaviours
- » Know how to identify and work with relevant organisations to develop knowledge and skills to support the development of children with challenging and ADHD-type behaviours
- » Understand how to work with other parents

### **Stigma**

Often, children with ADHD-like behaviours, their families and the school/teachers need additional support from other professionals and services. This section considers how to work within your community to address stigma and to work with other professionals.

Stigma is so common when it comes to ADHD and the effects are so serious on children and families that we need to involve the whole community and the people within that community to tackle it. Stigma is about negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards particular children, people, or groups based on something about them that is seen as 'different,' 'abnormal' or 'bad'. As a result, people are often labelled negatively and excluded, rejected and devalued by society. People may also be treated unfairly with disgust or disapproval.

What causes ADHD-related stigma:

- » A lack of knowledge or understanding about ADHD
- » Negative attitudes or feelings towards children and families affected by ADHD/ADHD-like behaviour



- » Children with ADHD-like behaviours or people with ADHD being seen only as a disorder or an illness
- » Discrimination and unfair treatment of children with ADHD-like behaviours that places limits on their education or other opportunities (e.g. being excluded from school)

Stigma can be:

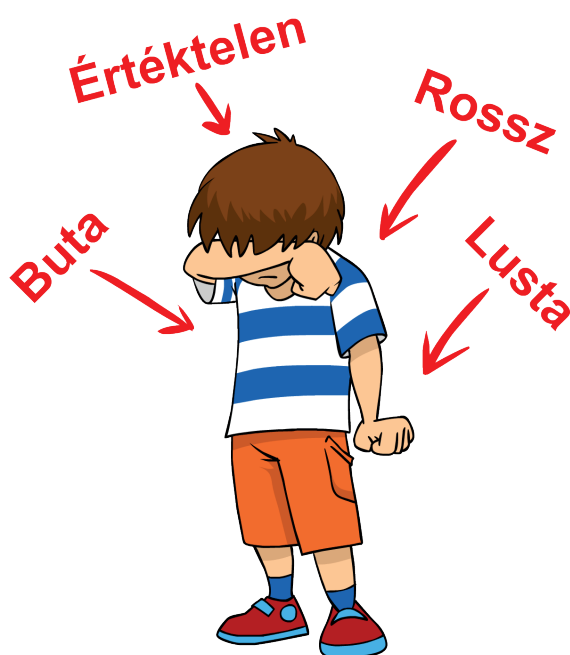
- » Public stigma – where society or communities hold negative thoughts, feelings, or behaviours toward people affected by ADHD
- » Self-stigma – when the person (or the child) believes and accepts these negative thoughts from the community and they come to believe them. They see themselves as ‘different’ or ‘bad’ or ‘abnormal’ or ‘less than’

Sometimes the effects of stigma can be worse than the primary difficulties. Stigma can harm a child's sense of self and their beliefs in themselves, which may influence all of their future behaviours, school, friendships, and work.

#### What you can do to tackle stigma:

- » Develop your own knowledge and understanding of ADHD
- » Teach others about ADHD
- » Teach others about stigma (e.g. have an anti-stigma campaign in your school or community)
- » Talk with others about ADHD in an open and positive way

**FIGURE 30.**  
**THE EFFECTS OF STIGMA CAN BE WORSE THAN THE PRIMARY DIFFICULTIES.**



- » Recognise and challenge stigma when you see others doing it or you see it on TV
- » Be careful of your language – think about how you talk about ADHD and the child with ADHD-like behaviours.
- » Think critically about your school, classroom, and community. Where is there stigma and what can you do to change it?

#### Working with other services

The kindergarten can be a source of information, a gate-keeper or communicator with or between other services (e.g. health and social care), so that the child and their family are supported. It's helpful to work with your school to identify local services. You can also talk to your doctor or try to find leaflets or brochures about services available in the community. If you are working with professionals, ask for their advice about what is available and where to go for information.

Co-operation between different care providers reduces costs and increases the availability of services for children and families. Access to services can improve children's school attendance and performance (Foy et al. 2014). When it comes to children with ADHD-like behaviours, co-operation between professionals and services is very important and comes with many advantages (Curran, 2018).

As discussed earlier, ADHD often requires different types of treatments and educational supports. There needs to be a whole team approach to understand the child's difficulties, plan effective interventions, and provide the interventions the child needs. The team might include:

- » teachers
- » special education teachers
- » kindergarten psychologists
- » kindergarten doctor and/or nurse
- » kindergarten social worker
- » developmental specialists including occupational therapists and/or speech and language therapists
- » parent
- » child

Different members of the team will bring with them different kinds of knowledge, different perspectives, they can explore ideas, sharing strategies and resources, as well as sharing the workload in terms of using interventions. The team will depend on your locally available services and the resources that you have in your local area.

Speak with your child's school, your family doctor, and any other professional services in your local area (e.g., family support, medical, clinical, psychological, social work, social care). These people should be able to tell you what is available and you may be able to get information about these online or within your local community.

## Support Groups

Peer support is a very effective tool for supporting children and families. For children, they can learn a lot from others who have similar difficulties. For parents, they can share their experiences with others who have similar difficulties and experiences. Support groups for parents can be a great source of practical and emotional support for parents. Try and find local support groups and if you don't have one locally, consider setting one up yourself.

## Advocacy organisations

There are various ADHD organisations that work to make life better for children and adults with ADHD and their families. These organisations can be a source of informa-

tion about ADHD and your child's rights. They often hold talks or other educational events. It is worth exploring what these organizations offer in your local area for a number of reasons. Foremost, these organisations may give parents a sense of belonging, as everyone there is fighting for the same. Moreover, if we want to tackle ADHD-related stigma, get access to more services, and change local and national policies, then it is important that these organisations have a wide membership and base of support.

## 4e Cooperation with the other parents

Being a parent of a child with ADHD-like behaviours means that **sometimes this can bring you into conflict with other parents, particularly if your child has hurt another child**. Sometimes when a parent feels like their child might be in harm's way they can go on the attack. If such a situation occurs, the positive relationship with the child's teacher can go a long way towards resolving conflict.

**Provide other people and parents in the community with information about ADHD.** Let them know that ADHD is something children are born with and it is not caused by bad parenting or a lack of education or a lack of discipline.

## Test yourself:

- » How can you address stigma in your home or community?
- » Why do you need to work with other professionals?
- » Who (beyond teachers / schools) might you need to get in touch with to support your child?

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